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A HARD WOMAN

A STORY IN SCENES

BY

VIOLET HUNT

AUTHOR OF "THE MAIDEN'S PROGRESS"

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A HARD WOMAN

A STORY IN SCENES

PREFACE

As a painter seeks far and wide for suitable models for his pictures, so a writer of novels, of the school to which I belong, has to pursue the same troublesome method. I am always on the lookout for the human document; I occasionally find it, and the chief personage of the story following has for some time past been one of my very best models. I have studied her long, and I think that no one knows her better than I do—her husband probably not excepted.

Though she is a conventional woman, she has somehow never thought it worth her while to adopt any ceremonious reserve with me. It is not complimentary to the man, who, however, pockets the affront for the benefit of the novelist. In the interests of literary art I have not scrupled to use

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my opportunities, and I have studied this woman from every point of view ; from the inside and from the outside ; directly from herself and indirectly from her friends and belongings, with all of whom I am intimately acquainted. Many conversations, which it was my privilege to hold with the lady herself, I have literally transcribed ; but I mean likewise to assume the novelist's prerogative, and set down, with equal confidence, scenes and conversations in which I, personally, had no part.

I have told her that I intended to put her in a novel some day. It is a little joke between us. She likes the idea, she plays with it—she often alludes to it—and even condescends to assist me in my work with hints and suggestions as to the development of her own character. But not for one moment would I accept her version, nor indeed would she accept mine, as it is set forth in these pages !

Am I acting unkindly to this lady ? It might at first seem so, but I confess that my artistic conscience is ungalled. The modern novelist is no more touched by scruples of this kind than the humane surgeon who cuts to cure. And if I had any prickings of remorse, they would disappear in the reflection that my dear Mrs. Munday, if she should ever catch a trace of her own lineaments in the glass I have endeavoured to hold before her,

would of herself supply an anodyne more anæsthetic than ether or chloroform—her vanity. She will read my novel, she will criticize it freely. She may approve or she may condemn, but one thing I am assured: she will never even grasp the fact that she herself is the subject—no, not even though she read this preface !

W. ST. JEROME.

SCENE I

THE domestic circle of the Barkers—of the eminent firm of Barker and Marindin, of Lothbury and of 56, Bedford Square—when my friend Lydia Munday still formed part of it a few years ago, was subject to the usual curse of large families, and never could decide where to bestow itself for the summer. This momentous decision was always deferred as long as possible. As poor Mrs. Barker said, what was the use of making plans that were always liable—nay, sure—to be upset at the last moment?

But there was no reason why the subject should not be discussed, and discussed it was, and generally at the family breakfast-table, when the family assembled every morning, fit and fresh and eager for the fray, all except the eldest daughter of the house, who preferred to take her breakfast in quiet, and had the best of reasons for not joining in a controversy whose ultimate decision, as she very well knew, rested with her.

The discussion was brought to an abrupt close

as usual, one day perilously near the first of August, by the bread-winner looking at his watch, rising hastily from his chair, and casting down his napkin with an air of despair.

"It's the same thing every day!" he remarked. "I'm sick of it. I've just ten minutes to get to Lothbury in. It takes twenty. Settle it all among yourselves—money's no particular object, as you know, but remember I must be able to get up to town once a week."

"He seems put out," said his wife, when the hall door had banged. She made this obvious remark—as she had several times before—to the most sympathetic of her three daughters.

Lucy did not point out this vain repetition to her mother. She was a sweet girl. She merely replied as usual—

"Yes, he does seem vexed, mother."

"And really *I* don't care where I go, so long as I get a little peace, and Lydia and Celestine don't grumble. It is such a plague taking a French maid about with one always, but if Lydia can't do without her, she can't!"

"Bless her bonny face," murmured the old Scotch aunt, from the other side of the table.

"There you go, aunty, always praising Lydia—or if it isn't Lydia, it's Fred, never me!" said the girl. Though sweet she was human.

"That reminds me," said the old lady, getting up rheumatically, and pulling the covers over the dishes, "she'll like her bacon hot when she does come down."

"Why can't Lydia condescend to get up and eat her breakfast at the same time as anybody else? It's right down unfair." It was Toosie, the school-girl, who spoke.

"Ah, but ye must remember Lydia was always a delicate lassie," mauldered Aunt Elspeth. "She must be considered—she canna just digest—"

"Rubbish, she can digest well enough, only she's greedy! The way we all spoil Lydia—"

"I wonder now if Lydia would like Bournemouth," pondered her mother. "Fred seems to want to go there."

"Oh, not Bournemouth! Whitby!" pleaded Toosie.

"Oh, no, not Whitby! Harrogate!" pleaded Lucy.

"Then you may just go to your horrid old Harrogate by yourself!"

"Girls! girls!" murmured Mrs. Barker.

"I do wish, mother," said Toosie, in an injured tone, "that you would not speak like that. It sounds just as if Lucy and I were quarrelling. We are only discussing. Lucy, you know that I know that you only want to go to Harrogate because

Mr. St. Jerome said he was going there! And I know you don't mean to have him, you only mean to whittle away the time with him. So what a shame it is to drag all your family off to a dull health resort, when they haven't got livers or anything to cure, just to help you to meet a young man you don't even mean to marry in the end! If you meant business, I'd be the first to help, but you can easily find some one just to flirt with at Whitby."

"Whitby is too dreadfully relaxing," complained Lucy, no whit abashed by this brutal analysis of her motives. In this family hard hitting and hard speaking were the rule.

"It's never too relaxing to flirt. Ask Lydia."

"I say, where do *you* want to go to, Aunt Elspeth?" cried the child, flinging her arms round the old lady. "Say Whitby, it's a lovely place for old ladies! They sit about the cliffs and watch us come up from bathing. Oh, it's awfully lively for them. Say Whitby, there's a dear old thing!"

Aunt Elspeth settled her cap. "Eh, ye're a clingsome lassie. We'll see, we'll see—as soon as Lydia comes down."

"Lydia again!" grumbled Lucy. "Here she is! Now we shan't get a word in."

Angry tones, crossing with deprecatory ones, were heard in the hall outside.

“Vraiment, c'est d'une stupidité——”

“Mais, mademoiselle——”

“Taisez vous ! Pas d'excuses ! Que cela soit défaire tout de suite, a l'instant——”

“Bien, mademoiselle.”

Depressed steps were heard pattering away in the direction of the servants' hall, the door opened in a free and large manner, and Miss Lydia Barker, the light of battle shining in her eyes, walked in.

“What are you scolding that unfortunate Celestine for ?” asked her mother.

“Her stupidity is intolerable ! Fancy, she was actually sending my grass lawn dress to be cleaned without unpicking the sleeves. The consequence is—oh bother, don't let's talk about it ! I want my breakfast.”

“You might at least say good-morning,” said her mother mildly.

“Oh, I forgot ! Good-morning, aunty ! Good-morning, Lucy. I've seen *you* already ! I came into your room to fetch my curling-tongs. You were asleep. What an object you looked ! Good-morning, Toosie, you little scaramouch ! What's in that dish by you, aunty ?”

“Rissoles.”

“Well, give me some of the old things,” she said resignedly. “I never knew a cook with so

little invention as ours. However, we must eat, or to-morrow we die! . . . There, I knew it—they're as cold as ice!"

"You should come down earlier," hazarded her mother mildly; "it's ten o'clock."

"Is it? We didn't leave the Symonds' till three, did we, Lucy? Why do you get up so early, Lucy? I suppose you like it. You aren't so exhausted as me. I take it out of myself tremendously. And then," she continued, in a low voice, "I had a very trying interview with young Symonds. You saw us, Lucy, thrashing it out in the conservatory? He made such a scene! Silly boy! . . . Toosie, do stop looking at me over your teacup! It fidgets me—and I'm very nervous to-day."

She ate a hearty breakfast and the family watched her in silence.

"How glum you all look this morning!" she remarked presently. "What's up?"

"It's settling where to go," said the other two, both at once.

"Oh, I'll soon settle that," said Lydia; "only just let me finish my breakfast."

She topped up with a large piece of bread and marmalade, and then, throwing down her napkin, exclaimed—

"Now then! Come on, everybody! I see you

all want something different. The best way is to do what nobody wants. We will take you all seriatim."

She put her arm round the old lady. "Aunt Elspeth, where I go thou goest, isn't it so? Mother, you're resigned, as usual. Father doesn't care. Lucy—how you do sniff, child! Have you got that wretched hay-fever of yours on again? I wonder you condescend. Well, what's your idea?"

"I've been advising them all to go to Harrogate," said Lucy languidly.

"*Advising*, she calls it," put in Toosie. "If you had only heard——"

"Now don't fight, little girls," said Lydia, waving her hand. "Am I to understand that the discussion has been somewhat heated on both sides?"

"No—only——" said Lucy.

"No—only——" said Toosie.

"Don't both speak at once!" said Lydia. "This amuses me. Now, Lucy, give me your arguments in favour of Harrogate as clearly and shortly as you can. They say we women can't do that. I can always say what I want in two words. Well, Lucy?"

"It's so nice and near for father," murmured Lucy, to which Toosie added "Hypocrite!"

"We'll leave father out just now," smiled Lydia—she had a cheerful, complaisant smile. "Give me your purely personal considerations! *Who else* is going to Harrogate?"

"The Symonds," replied Lucy eagerly, "and Mrs. Wynne—and Mr. St. Jerome and his mother—and the Maynes have taken a house four miles off——"

"Well sandwiched, Lucy! I admire your tact. Well, but I object strongly to the Symonds, and St. Jerome bores *me* to extinction—just now. I don't want to get mixed up with the Wynnes more than I can help. I want to improve our set instead of lowering it—it is bourgeois enough already, heaven knows—and why should I walk four miles into the country to see the Maynes when I wouldn't take a shilling cab to see them in town? That's unanswerable, isn't it?"

"But——"

"Closure!" said Lydia firmly. "Now, Toosie, your turn! Try to clothe your sentiments in decent English, and we shall be delighted to listen to you. Why do you want to go to Whitby?"

"Because it's got a beach worth mentioning, and such good donkeys, and a cliff full of Bedlamites and Amorites, and lots of shipwrecks, and larks like that——"

"A hateful place," put in Lucy, "where it is

always windy if it isn't rainy, where the little boys throw herrings at you in the street, and scaly fishermen rub against you and ruin your dress, and—”

“Yes,” said Lydia meditatively. “I agree with Lucy there. It isn't at all a nice place for any one over twelve years old . . . No, I don't intend to go to Whitby.”

“Then,” observed her mother, “it's no use taking up that advertisement about the house in St. Hilda's Terrace, is it?”

“Not a bit, mother! Eliminate Whitby. Spell eliminate, Toosie, and don't make faces. Now listen, all of you! I've thought this out myself. There's a place called Prawnborough that I have been hearing about. It's a place where artists go to paint. Lucy can keep up her sketching. It's on the south coast. It's rather wild, but I should not mind that. It's rather quiet, but we've had enough of Scarborough and Harrogate, and the hateful crowds who go there.”

“But who goes to Prawnborough? Who told you of it?” said Mrs. Barker timidly. “Do you know of any lodgings?”

“All the fishermen's wives let lodgings,” said Lydia, evading the first part of the question. “I know of some. In fact I've written. I thought it would save trouble, as I had quite determined

to go there. Oh, you'll like it. There's a pier for Lucy and a beach for Toosie. You'll square father, won't you, mother? Aunt Elspeth, you old dear, you don't care so long as your children are happy, and there's a parson at Prawnborough who will give you three services a day if you like!"

"Bless the child!" murmured the old lady.
"Always thinking of others!"

The others murmured something, simultaneously, which sounded very like "Selfish pig!"

"What are you two girls mumbling?" said Lydia urbanely.

"Nothing complimentary!" they both assured her.

"Don't repeat it then."

"Please, Lydia," interrupted the younger girl humbly, "are there any donkeys there?"

"Not yet," said Lydia meaningly.

"It's all very well," Lucy spoke solemnly. "I know *quite well* who you are going for, Lydia. The Wilkinsons have taken a house there, I know—but is there likely to be any one there *I* can speak to?"

"The Malorys are going, I fancy," said Lydia negligently; "and I heard that man we met last night say he was going, when he heard I was."

"Who?"

"That long-legged man who can't dance—Mr. Woffle."

"Why, *he's yours!*"

"Oh, I'll lend him to you if you like. He bores me. And so ugly! He'd have red hair I suppose—if he had any."

"I'm very much obliged to you, I am sure," said Lucy sarcastically. Then, as all the rest of the party gradually straggled away, leaving her and her sister alone, she plucked up a spirit, and said in a low voice, "I suppose you will have your hands full. Well, I hope for all our sakes you will manage it this summer, and I'll be a good sister to you, and not tell him what a beast you are at home!"

SCENE II

On the Beach at Prawnborough. MISS LYDIA BARKER sitting, writing on her knee.

DEAR MRS. MALORY—

Excuse pencil. I promised to write and tell you all about Prawnborough, didn't I? Well, to begin with, it isn't quite the sort of place we generally come to; but I was getting tired of the rowdy Margate-Eastbourne-Herne-Bay style. This is a nice, quiet, well-bred place—very good form, if one may say so. There's no band, but there's a view somewhere I'm told, and it's a kind of place that artists and bishops come to. There's something very dignified about a bishop. His legs quite adorn a parade. Yes, I'm glad I took Arthur Wilkinson's suggestion, and came here.

I can always make my people go where I like. They know I know what's good for them, and never dream of seriously objecting. It's the empire of a strong mind over a weak family. They tell me to make up their minds for them, and when

they grumble afterwards, I always say—"Well, you know you left it to me!" So they did—so they do—it's never any good their doing anything else!

Not but what they didn't grumble a good deal this time. Prawnborough sounded so different to what they had been used to, and mother never cares to wander from her own fireside; but what with painters and paperers and house-cleaners I take care to make her own fireside so hot—I mean so cold—for her, that she's glad enough to leave it. Then father had some ridiculous notion about being in touch with his own doctor! As if there weren't doctors who find it worth their while to be sympathetic at every sea-side place! Lucy has no initiative. She always likes what I like—in the end—though I am not sure she hadn't a sneaking preference for Harrogate. Fred wanted us all at Bournemouth, because the air there suits him down to the ground. There's a girl there suits him down to the ground, I know well enough, but I don't want any sister-in-law that I haven't chosen myself, so I wouldn't entertain that project for a single moment! All that Toosie cares for is that there should be a good beach. I took the responsibility, and said there were "golden sands" at Prawnborough, and now it turns out to be only shingle!

I have found out where the Wilkinsons' house is.

A perfect mansion ! They're richer than we are, even. It's much nicer than our place, but then it isn't lodgings, you see. We had to take what we could get.

Arthur Wilkinson comes down to-day. He told me all about Prawnborough at the Symonds' dance, and insisted on my coming here and bringing my family. "You can work it, you know," he said. Poor boy ! he has the greatest confidence in my *savoir faire*. He is a mere good and chattel of his family, he says. I think I see Mrs. Wilkinson ordering *me* about, if I were her daughter-in-law !

I can be her daughter-in-law if I like. Arthur adores me. I mean to—do I ? Yes, I think I do—on the whole. I am twenty-five, and one man is very like another—so long as he's a gentleman. I can improve Arthur too, a good deal.

At any rate, I told him I would come to Prawnborough this summer. I took the matter into my own hands, consulted Bradshaw, and wrote to the address Arthur gave me for lodgings ; and we have got them—seven rooms—or rather one room and six cupboards ; nothing found, and all extras supplied for the use of the landlady for seven guineas a week ! That's my little joke. Though Prawnborough isn't fashionable, it seems a very expensive place.

They were all rather disappointed as we lurched

down the hill in the creaky old station fly. Mother kept saying she should never get up it again alive, and it did not even seem to be picturesque. I must say I thought Arthur said *red* roofs, but one can't have everything here below; and after an eight hours' journey one is apt to see roofs and everything else grey. At any rate, I saw a very smart woman standing at the station, near a stack of luggage labelled Nugent, and some of it Munday. I looked. She had a footman with her, and there was a very good-looking man about; but I don't know if he belonged to her or no. I wish Arthur would wear that sort of suit; I rather think I hate the patterns of his trousers—too large! I wonder who the Nugents—or Mondays—are? and if we shall come across them? I shall make it my business to. I want to collect nice friends.

Our rooms are certainly rather bare and small, and the arm-chairs look like geological formations, and as if countless children had for centuries scrambled over them, and nibbled their corners off, and there's a wall-paper that simply shouts at you. But when mother had put out her twelve home comforts—you know she always travels with twelve home comforts, in the shape of candlesticks, blotter, and vaporizer, and cushions, and so on—the room began to look nicer. The sofas are of horse-hair, and strictly on the offensive. They would

certainly push one off if one attempted to lie on them, but I don't mean to have headaches. The bedrooms are quite tiny; my window opens straight on to the water-but^t—but then mother's won't even shut. There isn't room for my dress boxes in my room, so I put them in the passage, and father has to tumble over them and swear every time. I've never been in Lucy and Toosie's room at all, but I believe it's even smaller than mine. They are always complaining, anyhow. Give me air and sunlight, and I ask nothing more.

* * * * *

"I believe I'll finish this letter indoors. The sun positively makes the letters dance. I can hardly see——"

* * * * *

"There's the man who was with the smart woman at the station, and a little girl with them! Are they husband and wife? No, they don't look married to each other. I'd back myself to tell. They're brother and sister. I wonder if he is Munday or Nugent? I wonder if I look at all nice, sitting here?

"He's very good-looking. I like the easy way he walks—with a kind of swing. How funnily he screws up his eyes to look at things. Oh! he is an artist, I see—got a sketching-block under his arm. That explains it.

"Did I remember to bring my block and drawing materials? I might take it up again!"

"He must be a good deal taller than Arthur Wilkinson—or is it because he is thin? I like tall men best. I don't think they grow in the City, somehow. The woman is tall too; she's not pretty, but so distinguished-looking, and very like him! Oh, she's his sister, she must be! And they've both got that curly dark hair I like."

"I wish they would look at me! They're on the next bench, and they never look my way. I don't suppose I am the kind of woman he admires. I'm not dressed like that woman, at any rate. She looks dowdy, if anything. I'm much better dressed, but this hat has really too many colours on it, I think."

"Fred, you are a perfect nuisance! Can't you amuse yourself? There's no sight in the world more deplorable than a man who can't employ himself, I think. Go and play billiards in the casino. No tips to the cues, you say? It's a bad workman quarrels with his tools. Why don't you go fishing, or sketching, or bathing, or something? No! Well, then, go and admire the beauties of nature. I'm told there are some about here. I suppose you are hankering after the beauties of Bournemouth . . . Arthur Wilkinson just arrived, you say? Coming along now? I hope you didn't

tell him I was sitting out here. I don't want him. I want to be quiet. If you have really nothing to do, follow those people home—those two on the bench there, and see what hotel they go to.

"Now, here's Lucy, looking as cross as the devil ; and how dreadfully sunburnt she has contrived to get in two days ! The lobster in the lobster-pot is nothing to her! . . . No shade here ! Now, really, Lucy, is there ever shade at the seaside ? You expect too much. Devonshire ? Well, I forgot Devonshire, and you never even proposed to go there when it was still time. And this is a most interesting place. Fred, those people are moving. Do go and do what I told you. And, Lucy, if you have nothing better to do, run into the house and get me my second volume. Mother has it ? Oh, substitute the third volume—she will never notice !

"Here is actually Arthur Wilkinson coming bounding along ! Just off the train. What zeal ! And what an owl he looks ! One ought never to see people coming a long way off.

"There's nobody left on the Parade. I am glad those people won't see Arthur come up and speak to me, at any rate. He will be so stupidly effusive. I shall go in and finish my letter to Mrs. Malory, I think."

SCENE III

SCENE.—*A lunch-table crowded with viands of a simple and wholesome character. MRS. HUGO MALORY is dispensing roast mutton and rice pudding to a quiverful of hungry children. Enter MISS LYDIA BARKER, a little out of breath.*

LYDIA. I've come to lunch, dear Mrs. Malory. Good-morning, Fräulein ! Good-morning, infants !

MRS. MALORY (*carving*). That's right, dear. Make room for Miss Barker, children. And why haven't you been to see me all this time ?

LYDIA. Oh, I don't know—time slips away. I've been so busy—so taken up (*meaningly*).

MRS. MALORY (*cumbered with serving*). Fräulein, will you kindly pass Johnny's plate ?

LYDIA. I came to—I wanted to see you—I have promised to be at home at four o'clock punctually.

MRS. MALORY (*absently*). Have you ? Johnny, don't stare so !

CHORUS OF CHILDREN. He's upset your tumbler of water, Miss Barker !

LYDIA. Tiresome little monster !

MRS. MALORY. Don't be angry with the child, he was looking at your hat. I don't know how it is, Lydia, but I never knew a girl so entirely without the maternal instinct as you.

LYDIA (*coolly*). No, you never did. I never even had a doll. (*Makes a hasty lunch.*) Mrs. Malory, do let Fräulein dispense the rice pudding, and come with me. I want to talk to you.

MRS. MALORY. Very well. (*They go up-stairs. Lydia sinks into a chair and tries to look different.*) My dear child, excuse me, but are you trying to blush? Ah, now you are, but only because I have found you out. Come, what is it? Something momentous? A serious quarrel with Lucy—or have you by any chance met your fate at last?

LYDIA (*with effect*). Yes, and It's coming to call at four o'clock this afternoon !

MRS. MALORY. Not really? You take my breath away! I was joking. Who is it?

LYDIA (*slowly*). It's not Mr. Symonds—or Mr. St. Jerome—or Mr. Wilkinson even. It's an artist—a friend of yours !

MRS. MALORY. You—and an artist!

LYDIA. I don't see why I shouldn't manage an artist as well as anybody else . . . It's Ferdinand Munday.

MRS. MALORY. Ferdinand Munday!

LYDIA. You do seem awfully surprised, dear Mrs. Malory. I didn't know that you had that sort of old-fashioned contempt for artists !

MRS. MALORY. My dear—Mr. Munday is so serious—so—

LYDIA. So am I—so everything—when I want to be. And he's not so serious as all that ; and I tell you he won my heart with drawing caricatures—

MRS. MALORY. I confess I don't know him from that point of view. Well, go on ! Wasn't there something about a young Wilkinson ?

LYDIA. Oh,—Arthur Wilkinson ! He isn't in it. All I know is that I shall be engaged to Ferdinand Munday this afternoon—at exactly ten minutes past four—at least it will be settled by then, I suppose.

MRS. MALORY (*pertinaciously*). But what have you done with the other ? Why, you took him to Prawnborough !

LYDIA. He came there, more fool he ! And then I saw what a mistake it would have been. He was devoted to me, of course ; it was really too palpable. He was always glowering at me in that possessive kind of way that seems to create an atmosphere round a girl and keep other men away don't you know. Quite unendurable !

MRS. MALORY. Poor young Wilkinson !

LYDIA. Poor or not, it is the one way to make a girl tired of you. I shouldn't advise any one to try it. A man, whatever he feels, ought to know how to keep a civil eye in his head.

MRS. MALORY. I suppose he was very much in love with you?

LYDIA. Well, I wasn't—and I got cross—and then—

MRS. MALORY. And then you met Ferdinand?

LYDIA. Yes, and you have no idea what a relief it was—such a change—

MRS. MALORY. I should think so.

LYDIA. Arthur Wilkinson never thought of anything or spoke of anything but money and City things. It would have been simply social suicide to marry him. Stockbroking never leads to anything except stockbroking—one makes the money, and there's no fun spending it among City people. Ferdinand is a nephew—no, cousin, is it?—of Lord Putney—

MRS. MALORY (*wincing*). Yes, I know.

LYDIA. But still, I wasn't quite sure if I cared actually to *marry* an artist, and so I kept him hanging about a little. I sat for him all the winter off and on, though; and he amused me—and you know at home we're all so dull since papa died—and they all go dumping about, and I get depressed, and ready to do anything—and yesterday I met

him outside Mudie's in the rain, and I was muddy, and he was muddy—there's a good pun there, though I say it who shouldn't—and everything looked miserable—I don't know what possessed me—but I told him to come and call to-day, and that meant—of course!—After all, one must marry somebody, some time!

MRS. MALORY (*effusively*). You poor child, you pretend to be cynical, but you want to be loved, I see, after all, like any other woman . . . (*casts her arms round MISS BARKER, and in so doing sweeps an ornament off the table with her elbow*).

LYDIA (*disengaging herself*). Don't! You make me feel rather a fool, don't you know. (*Picks up the ornament and looks at it.*) I rather like these china monkeys—they're quaint.

MRS. MALORY (*a little abashed*). And you can talk of china monkeys!

LYDIA. Why not? It's as good a subject as another.

MRS. MALORY. But now, when you are standing on the threshold of—the most important step of a girl's life—! It must open up such vistas—

LYDIA. Ah, but I've looked down those vistas so often. I've thought about being married before, you know—one has to. And I hate the "I've found him, I've found him, my king, my king," attitude, and "lovers soaring into the empyrean on the

wings of love," and all that. I'd rather grovel in the Park on a fine day. I'm not sentimental.

MRS. MALORY. Girls are not, now-a-days. Well, go on. What are you going to say to him when he comes?

LYDIA. Yes. Just yes. No raptures. I suppose he'll kiss me. I hate being kissed.

MRS. MALORY. My dear girl, Ferdinand Munday is supposed to be awfully good-looking.

LYDIA. Of course, or I wouldn't marry him. I want a good match . . . I say, who did this room for you?

MRS. MALORY. Liberty — no, Morris — I forget.

LYDIA. Oh, but do try and remember! I want mine just so. White enamel—it's so pretty. Ferdinand has got a lot of old furniture in his studio in Holland Villas Road, that I shall draft in, but I want the basis to be white. There's Gray, R.A.'s old house in Pont Street I've had my eye on for a long time. There's a good drawing-room and a capital dining-room, and a studio that will do beautifully for receptions, and a dear little place at the back that will be my boudoir—done in yellow—my colour. My husband shall never enter it except by special invitation. Men hate to find a woman's husband sitting about when they call.

MRS. MALORY. But where is he to go, after painting hours?

LYDIA. To the club, or to call on other women.

MRS. MALORY. You might end by disliking that.

LYDIA. Oh no. I should expect him to have his little flirtations, just as I should have mine. Love and let love, or at least flirt. That's my motto. I should be quite nice to *her*, and ask her to dinner—drive her about—

MRS. MALORY. My dear Lydia, all this sounds very immoral! How did you pick up such theories in Bedford Square?

LYDIA. I don't know. I think for myself, I suppose. It *is* my theory that half the unhappiness of married life comes of husbands and wives being constantly together—all in all to each other. Pooh! It's a bad plan. Besides, I couldn't engage to keep him amused. I shouldn't have time . . . Oh, please, what time is it? I must be at home by four—and in the drawing-room—in an elegant attitude of expectation—

MRS. MALORY. Dear Lydia, think! It is the most solemn moment of your whole life—this interview you are going to have—

LYDIA. I know that. I've lots of points I must make. One must be prepared, and not allow oneself to be put upon. But I'm not afraid. I know what I want.

MRS. MALORY. And what does he want?

LYDIA (*triumphantly*). Me!

MRS. MALORY (*looking at her*). You certainly are a wonderfully pretty creature, but—

LYDIA (*anxiously*). You think I could have done better?

MRS. MALORY. That is not what I meant.

LYDIA. No, really I think I am doing for the best, for he is so good-tempered, and reliable, and won't worry me about trifles,—and it's for life, you know. Why do you look at me like that?

MRS. MALORY. Go on. Let me hear. What other little stipulations are you going to make?

LYDIA. Oh, are you interested in that? So am I. Let me see. There are some very important things. My settlement—but that's all arranged for. The money papa left me is, you know, absolutely mine. I must say he managed everything very neatly before he died. But you don't mean about money, you mean about the little points that one must settle for oneself, don't you? Ferdinand must promise to drop any of his bachelor friends I don't like—and not litter up my house with shabby artists. He must never ask me where I have been, or where I am going, or expect me to dance with him at balls. I should not mind, but it looks so bad. And he is not to wish to see any letters I may write or receive.

MRS. MALORY. You might want to see his?

LYDIA (*smiling*). No, for they will be bills.

MRS. MALORY. Not necessarily. That brings us to the great question of ante-nuptial revelations. Shall you insist on being told everything, like girls in novels?

LYDIA. I'm not the least like a girl in a novel. I don't mean to ask any questions. I shouldn't care for him if he hadn't had a past—but I don't want to know about it. How serious we have got! . . . Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you. May I have Johnny and Guy to hold up my train? Lucy and Toosie will be bridesmaids, of course. I haven't settled if it's to be in St. George's or St. Paul's, yet—St. George's, I think, because the aisle is broader, and it doesn't cramp the procession so. I hate a messy wedding. Mine shall be in the afternoon, and—oh, I say, it's a quarter to four. I must go. You might advise me. You know if I'm ever to make any conditions I must do it now. Afterwards will be too late.

MRS. MALORY (*coldly*). Can't you leave it to him?

LYDIA. Leave it to him? Why I should like it down in black and white—only it wouldn't be decent. But I must keep my head level, and mind what I'm about . . . Well, good-bye, the hour is come—and, I hope, not the man yet, till I am

ready. Now (*solemnly*) I know that this is a most important interview—the whole happiness of my married life depends on it. Tell me, before I go, do you think I have forgotten anything?

MRS. MALORY. No, dear, you have forgotten nothing of importance—from your own point of view; but—I may be old-fashioned—I think you are leaving out the one thing that would make your marriage a success.

LYDIA (*eagerly*). Oh, what?

MRS. MALORY. The one thing needful. Love!

LYDIA (*deprecatingly*). Dear Mrs. Malory!

SCENE IV

"Oh yes, Lydia's married—a fortnight ago—and a good thing too!" said Miss Lucy Barker emphatically, as she sat down in her sister's old place, and poured me out some tea. "Sugar? I can't think why you didn't manage to come back from the Riviera in time for the wedding, Mr. St. Jerome! Horrid of you! We all looked so nice."

"I am sure you did. But I really knew nothing about it till it was nearly over. You announced the engagement and sent me wedding cards in the same letter!"

"It was Lydia. She made up her mind in a flash. She always does."

"The moment I heard the great news I wrote to congratulate her, and ordered her a present. Did it come all right?"

"Rather!"

"And some flowers to console you."

"What for?" said she derisively. "Then the

flowers *were* for me! I knew they were! Lydia would have it they were meant for her; but for once I stood out. You did put Lucy, not Lydia, did not you?"

"If I had meant them for your sister, I should have addressed them to Miss Barker."

"That wouldn't have made the slightest difference. Lydia always collared both 'Miss Barker' and 'Miss L. Barker.' It was most awkward. However, it is all right now." She gave a vast sigh of relief.

"You breathe freely?"

"Well, you know, Lydia was terribly managing. We couldn't call our souls our own. She was always doing hateful things to us for our good. We hated our good. Shall I tell you what Fred and I did the very next day after she went? We set to work and altered all the furniture in the drawing-room. Lydia was so particular about the way things were. And she said things were fashionable that were only uncomfortable, you know. But the moment she married we left off taking in the *Nineteenth Century* and stodgy magazines like that, and took in *Punch* instead, and we put poor Toosie into long frocks—Lydia always kept her young—and gave the cat leave to sit up-stairs, and the dogs, poor things! And I've got a room to myself, and my own letters

without having to fight for them, and my own way—”

“It suits you. I never saw you look so well. But now tell me all about Lydia.”

“Bother Lydia!”

“But I want to know about her. She was a friend of mine, you know—not so much as you, of course,” I added hastily. “Was she *very* sorry to go away and leave you all?”

“Sorry? Lydia! Why, she was as cool as a cucumber!”

“Common-place simile!”

“Oh, please don’t be so particular! I’m not writing a novel. Are you?”

“Perhaps I am, Lucy. Well, and so Lydia took it coolly?”

“She never cried once. *We* all did. I can’t think why.”

“Joy?” I hazarded.

“Ah, but mother didn’t cry for joy! She adores Lydia. Why, she bursts out crying even now—it is a whole fortnight since—when she comes across things of Lydia’s about the house.”

“Her doll, for instance?”

“Her doll! Fancy Lydia with a doll! She never had one. She says herself she hasn’t the maternal instinct; her one idea when she sees a baby is to throw it out of the window. She liked

boys' games best. A regular tomboy! I never knew any one with such a strong wrist as Lydia. She could put even Fred down."

"What does Fred say about the great event?"

"Oh, Fred is rude, as usual! He says we have got rid of our family fiend—our domestic devil! Fred and Lydia never got on, you know. How they used to fight! Lydia hit very hard. I often think I might have been clever—cleverer, I mean—if Lydia had not stunted my intellect by bashing my head against the nursery fender so often when we were little. Did you ever hear how she tied—"

"Is Munday equal to the occasion, do you think?"

"How do you mean?"

"Has he any idea of asserting himself—of putting his foot down—I mean—if need were? Is he able to stand up to her, in point of fact?"

"Oh but, Mr. St. Jerome, Lydia never means to quarrel! She would not condescend. She would consider it too awfully low and undignified to quarrel with her husband. She always said she never would. She knows how to manage men, she says—she has thought it all out. She wouldn't think of allowing herself to be put upon. All that's over, she says. A woman is as good as a man now-a-days."

"Better perhaps."

"Well, of course in some ways Lydia is far smarter than Ferdinand. He's awfully nice, but he's an artist, and puts all the cleverness into his pictures. He really wanted a managing woman to look after him, and get him on."

"Ah, I see, our dear Lydia married him from purely altruistic motives?"

Lucy looked bewildered. I remembered the before-mentioned incident in connection with the nursery fender, and forbore. "Is he good-looking?"

"Yes—very—I think so, not that Lydia cares about that! She prefers to be the beauty. But he admires her awfully—thinks her a healthy young goddess, a kind of Artemis, he says."

"I begin to understand," I said. "And where did he meet her *en Artemis*? At the seaside?"

"At Prawnborough. He was staying there, sketching, with his married sister, Lady Nugent. Lady Nugent didn't take to Lydia at first—sisters never do—but of course she had to afterwards. Well, and then Lydia got bored with Mr. Wilkinson—he is Fred's partner, you know—after she had made him propose to her—we went to Prawnborough on purpose—and hated the sight of him, so she took up Ferdinand Munday, and sketched too. And then when we came back to town, he used to come and call. I remember him at our Christmas tree, and how he stood and watched

Lydia romping with the children—he talked of her just as if she were a picture."

"She's not the least like *his* pictures."

"Men always fall in love with *not* their ideals!" said Lucy knowingly. "He thought her very handsome, anyhow—and he asked her to come to his studio and pose for him as Britomart. Who was Britomart, Mr. St. Jerome?"

"Read your *Faery Queen*."

"Couldn't! Tried once! Lydia did though—the bits about Britomart, at least, so as to be able to talk to Ferdinand about her. She got up all that sort of thing, and pretended to take a wild interest in the Middle Ages."

"She posed for him, in fact—in more ways than one."

"It was great fun," continued Lydia's candid chronicler, giggling. "I used to go with her to the studio, to chaperon her. It was as good as a play! She was so soft and gentle, and sentimental even—not a bit like what she was at home! I must say she laid it on pretty thick; but then men will stand anything! Of course I didn't give her away, you know. I am a good sister. I always back up Lydia in public, even if I quarrel with her in private. Besides, I wanted her married! This house wouldn't hold us both. So I played up too, and by the time the picture

was finished, Ferdinand thought her a perfect angel."

"Well, and so she is!"

"Mr. St. Jerome!" said Lucy deprecatingly. "Why, Lydia knows herself she isn't. We used to laugh about it together."

"The cynicism of the modern girl is to me quite appalling! Well, this pose of your sister's—tell me—from what I know of Munday, from hearsay, and his art, I should say she must have needed a good deal of pose! The constrained position—why did your sister undergo it? Did she care for him so very much?"

"She never said," replied Lucy, with simplicity, "but I suppose so. And then, you know, Lydia always loathed Bedford Square."

"I fail to see the connection."

"The Bedford Square connection—the society, I mean. Lydia hated all our set; she wanted to enlarge her sympathies——"

"Save the mark!"

"I don't always understand you, Mr. St. Jerome! I mean, Lydia thought she was wasted among City people—and artists go into such *very* good society now! Ferdinand is a young man of extraordinary promise, sure to make his mark in British art." Lucy seemed to be quoting from contemporary critiques, carefully collected doubtless by

her sister to authorize her choice, "and then he has a very nice sister, living in Eaton Square—Lady Nugent—and she is to present Lydia——"

"Dear me! And will Lydia present you?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "She means to do a good deal for her family. Father and mother were such a pair of stick-in-the-muds, and had no idea of getting on."

"They made the money, anyhow."

"Getting on socially, I mean. Think of this awful Bedford Square! Lydia's got a lovely red-brick house in Pont Street. It belonged to that R.A. who died lately. She chose it herself—with a big studio, so that she can give parties. Ferdinand gave her *carte blanche*. He used to have an old barrack in Holland Villas Road. He is dreadfully careless and abstracted, but he's got a fearful temper, I know, though he is generally not minding things much. His best man—Mr. Verschoyle, you know—picked him out of his studio in his old painting-blouse at twelve o'clock on the morning he was to be married! He had quite forgotten! But Lydia was all ready. Everything was settled. We had even rehearsed the wedding ceremony several times—Toosie was clergyman—so that there should be no hitch—and there wasn't!"

"And where did they go for the honeymoon?"

"To Lady Seymour's place in Devonshire. She

lent it to Ferdinand. They're old friends of his. So quiet and retired! They must be very happy, for they have not written once. It's a fortnight ago now. This is my bridesmaid's dress altered. Poor mother! she watches the post every day for a letter, and there never is one. It wouldn't take her long to write a letter. We all think Lydia very unkind. She might write, don't you think, even if she is happy?"

"Perhaps she isn't."

"Trust her!" said Lucy. "If she wasn't we should soon hear."

We were interrupted by what might have been called an indiscreet cough in the back drawing-room.

"Aunt Elspeth—waking up," exclaimed Lucy. Aunt Elspeth never dared to go to sleep in the back drawing-room in Lydia's time. "Do go and speak to her!"

"Ah, and how did ye leave Lydia?" asked the old lady, who appeared to be under the impression that I was her nephew-in-law. Nobody ever tried to disabuse her of any impression she chose to be under. It was known to be useless. "How is the bonny lamb? Have you brought me a kiss from her?"

I explained that I was unprovided with that commodity.

"Where have ye hidden her?" wailed the poor old lady. "We're all fairly wearying for a sight of her."

"Well, we are bearing up, Toosie and I," remarked Lucy to me, as we drew the curtain and closed this painful audience. "I don't know how it is, but old women always adore Lydia. She makes a point of behaving to them all as if they might leave her money. It is a good rule. She's so happy, she is forgetting it now, though. I do think she might write to the poor old thing!"

Young Fred Barker—I don't care for Fred, he is in business in Manchester, and only comes home now and then on a flying visit—caught me in the hall as I went out. He slapped me on the back in his detestable free-and-easy style.

"I say, St. Jerome, why didn't you come back in time to see old Lydia turned off? You and she were such pals. We don't know where she are! She has not condescended to write to her sorrowing family. Worries the *mater* terribly. I believe, myself, she's up to something or other!"

SCENE V

"LOOK! Second row of the stalls!" said Cossie Davenant, who was sitting next me, raising his patronizing glasses. "That really is quite a pretty woman! Do look at her, St. Jerome?"

"Now then, Cossie," I said, without looking, "let me hear your idea of a really pretty woman—modern, of course? Hair dyed last fashionable shade—*nez retroussé*—expression impudent—complexion hidden under a coat of paint——?"

"Half right, half wrong, St. Jerome. This woman has a straight little Greek nose, her hair—well, it's too bright for dye, perhaps it's her own? Her complexion is, I'm sure, but she looks as impudent as you like—deliciously insolent! Her eyes are grey and clear—no stupid mystery about them—and her eyebrows are a thin dark line, a shade darker than her eyes, and there's any amount of fun and go in the turn of her lips—they're rather thin, but quite red——"

"By Jove, it must be Lydia Munday!" I

snatched his glass. Yes, it was. "She was only married the other day. I did not know she was in town. I must go and speak to her."

"You can introduce me if you like," said Davenant, affecting carelessness.

"If *she* likes," I said; and made my way with some difficulty to where the bride was sitting beside her handsome husband, with her little head in the air, and looking straight before her.

"What a nuisance all these people must think you!" was her laconic greeting. "Ferdinand, let me introduce you to Mr. St. Jerome, my guide, philosopher, and friend—"

"I imagined you were still in Devonshire," I said.

"*Pas si bête!*" she replied coolly. Then, putting up her *pince-nez*—she had actually started a *pince-nez*!—"Who is that nice boy you are here with?"

"Cossie Davenant. At least, I am sitting next him."

"He has got what the nurses call an angel face."

"Angel is only skin deep, I am afraid."

"Ah, you don't like him. Who is he?"

"Nobody—the eldest son of Lord Fulham. Your husband knows him, I think?"

"Oh yes," said Munday indifferently.

"Why, you never told me, Ferdinand!"

"Why should I?" he said lazily.

"Isn't he nice? I am always seeing his name in the society papers."

"Hardly a guarantee of respectability," said I.
"Poor Cossie! He has been very badly brought up."

"By Lady Fulham?"

"By several women of my acquaintance. Do you want to have a try?"

"Well, would he be useful to know?" asked Mrs. Munday seriously. "I want to get a nice set about me."

"I scarcely think Cossie Davenant will improve your set."

"Why, I thought he was smart."

"Oh, very! I'll introduce him to you presently, but I suppose I must go back now; the curtain is just going up."

"No, don't; stay and talk to me."

"Wouldn't people object?"

She leant towards her husband, and said in a low voice, "Ferdinand, would you mind going and sitting by Mr. Davenant, and then Mr. St. Jerome can have your place by me?"

"But I don't want to go and sit next that little beast Davenant," he replied, still lower.

"Neither does Mr. St. Jerome. I am sure he would much rather sit next me—would you not, Mr. St. Jerome?"

Munday went; as, indeed, he could hardly help doing. "Now we will have a good talk," said Lydia Munday.

"But how about the play?"

"Oh, the play can take care of itself! We did not come to see it, only to pass the time—it is so dull staying in in the evenings in an hotel!"

"When did you come up? You were only married a fortnight ago!"

"Don't look so shocked! We stayed five mortal days in Devonshire—in that old mouldering lodge of the past the Seymours lent us. One must go away, I suppose, for a short time, for the sake of appearances and to impress the servants; but it is a fearful bore—unless one could have gone to Paris, or Monte Carlo——"

"There is an old-fashioned sentiment called the honeymoon——" I began.

"Very old-fashioned—absurd, in fact. It is going out, you know, luckily. People can't stand it. I know I couldn't have borne it much longer. Ferdinand and I were always together—strolling about in dripping green lanes—no help for it—everybody avoided us like lepers! And I moped, and he moped; and I saw all his faults, and he saw some of mine; and he had tempers, and I had tempers; and it isn't safe to indulge one's little moods in a house *temp.* Elizabeth—is that a pun?—so I

said to him one fine—no, one rainy day, ‘My dear——’”

“Have you got to that already?”

“I dislike exaggerated terms of endearment. I never use them.”

“That is not what I meant, exactly. Go on.”

“I said that I had had enough of it, that I knew he was dying to get back to his models—I mean to his pictures—and I to my furnishing, so we came up to town and put up at the Metropole. I’m simply awfully busy, going about to shops, and exchanging wedding presents. People are so silly——”

“To give them?”

“Not to give one cheques instead.” She counted on her fingers. “Let me see, I had fifteen teapots, and twenty cream-jugs, and two pianos—and I never play; however, I’ve got good value for them all. By the way, did *you* give me a china tea-service from Good’s? I get so mixed.”

“I decline to say, lest I embarrass you.”

“It would not embarrass me at all, I assure you. I’m not sentimental, you know, and business is business all the world over. Well, if you won’t tell me, you can’t be cross if I change it . . . As I was saying—I wish you would hush that rude man who keeps saying ‘Hush!’—as if any one wanted to attend to a play like this!—I consider

propinquity is the worst enemy of affection. It is the greatest mistake in the world to get too intimate——”

“Especially with one’s husband.”

“Lady Seymour told me that Sir Joseph and she had never been parted a week since their wedding day. ‘It works so well, dear,’ she said to me. Considering that only the other day I saw Sir Joseph Seymour——” She broke off abruptly, and covered her face with her hands. “There is going to be a pistol! Oh, dear!”

“Shall I go and fetch your natural protector?”

“Oh, if you want to leave me——”

“Not at all,” I said. “I was only thinking of how bored your husband must be with Davenant.”

“If you go, I shall get Mr. Davenant to come here instead. Ferdinand knows him. I find Ferdinand knows lots of nice people.”

“Oh, everybody knows Cossie—including the ladies of the ballet——”

“I rather want to explore that type of young man.”

“It’s a very common type now-a-days—the decadent type—the old head on young shoulders that our grandmothers always voted an impossibility. But what could you expect? It was allowed to leave Eton at sixteen, it lay about on sofas, and read French novels, and drank absinthe.

It has been everywhere, and learnt nothing ; done everything and enjoyed nothing ; lives for itself—and the choice of a necktie——”

“ What a neat little paragraph for your next novel ! Your Mr. Davenant quite excites my curiosity now.”

“ I hoped I had put you off him.”

“ We never had anybody of that sort at home,” said she pensively. “ That reminds me—I was going to ask you not to give me away if you should happen to call in Bedford Square. We are not supposed to be back in town yet.”

“ I know that,” I said. “ I called yesterday. Your family is wretchedly anxious about you. Would there be any harm in their knowing where you are ?”

“ They would all come bothering, and giving advice—and they would be so fearfully shocked at my leaving Devonshire ! They consider a bride should be boxed up for the regulation fortnight at least—they’re old-fashioned, you know !”

“ But you might write.”

“ Then they would see from the postmark that I am in London ! Oh, Mr. St. Jerome, nobody would think you were a novelist !”

“ Madam, you will find I am—to your cost.”

“ Are you going to put me in a novel ?”

“ With your permission.”

"I don't mind. Only you must make me very smart and fashionable, you know."

"It would be impossible to make you anything else," I said politely. "I shall study you. I shall trace the outcome of the charming theories of life you have been laying down: the dangers of propinquity, and so on. You will of course live up to them and illustrate them in your own person—"

She laughed. "I see, you want me to be a human document? This is what comes of being the intimate friend of a novelist. Everything must be grist that comes to his mill."

"Will you come to my mill?"

"Poor Mr. St. Jerome! I pity you. You will take immense pains and fancy you have got me, to the life, but it won't be me, all the same! A novelist has only got one type—that of the only woman he ever loved. One reads his books, one cherishes his ideals, and then one meets him and he introduces '*My Wife!*' Tableau! Or Curtain! And even then his portrait of her isn't in the least like. Man only knows one woman here below—and mostly knows her wrong!"

"Your remarks are profound. Is it the third or last act that is going on?"

Mr. Marischal, the lessee and manager of the Piccadilly Theatre, who was "strutting his brief

hour" on his own stage, is a personal friend of mine, and had sent me my stall. I caught his glittering eye fixed on me reproachfully from time to time. I was behaving disgracefully. But Mrs. Munday would not take a hint. So I went on. "Why don't you write a novel yourself?"

"I have never had time. Besides, I don't care to give myself away for the benefit of Smith and Mudie . . . Good heavens! The play is over! I think it was too awfully stupid, don't you?"

"I am not competent to pronounce on it, thanks to you. Will you and your husband come and sup at the Savoy with me?"

"Yes, with pleasure. Ask that Mr. Davenant."

"Certainly. But you are to talk to me a little."

"I shall distribute my favours equally. Ferdinand, Mr. St. Jerome wants us to—what are you looking at?"

"That girl over there, five rows back!" said Munday. "I never saw such hair in my life! Look, Lydia, over there!"

"Where? Sitting between the cormorant in pink and the whale with the string of pearls round her neck? Yes, I do see her. I think somebody should lend her a comb."

"What would I not give for that girl to sit to me!" murmured the painter enthusiastically, fol-

lowing her with his eyes. "I could make something of her."

"How dreadful to be an artist," said Lydia, "and look upon everybody as raw material! Ferdinand even tried it on with me at first—wanted me to sit for his Elaines and Bellamours and unearthly women of that sort. I declined. I look far too healthy—don't I, Mr. St. Jerome?"

Then I introduced her to Cossie, whom she began to snub with her tongue and encourage with her eyes at once; and we went in two cabs to the Savoy.

* * * * *

"I have asked Mr. Davenant to call when we get straight. Don't you think he might amuse me?" she said to me, as we walked down the stairs of the Savoy together. "This has been a very pleasant evening, on the whole, though I did not think much of the play. Now mind you don't go calling on my people and defeating my little plans! I am not ready to see them yet. I'll tell them when I am."

"I will be absolutely discreet—but tell me, what does your husband say to these little finessings?"

"Ferdinand thinks,"—she burst out laughing,— "he thinks that my family is treating me very badly indeed."

"How so?"

"Because they have never been to see me."

"How can they, if they don't know where to find you?"

"Ferdinand doesn't know that they don't know. Do you think me *quite* a fool, Mr. St. Jerome? Good-night."

A fool? No!

SCENE VI

SCENE.—*The school-room at 56, Bedford Square.*

LUCY *sewing.* FRED *smoking.* TOOSIE *singing.*

MRS. MUNDAY *enters in a rustle of silk and clatter of high-heeled shoes.* *Sensation!*

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, family, how are you? Fred here? Unexpected pleasure! . . . Good heavens, I've kissed you all! I can't think why I did.

LUCY. Considering this is the first time you've condescended to come near us since you went away—

TOOSIE. And that you have never even answered our letters—

MRS. MUNDAY (*waving her hand*). There now, children, don't all speak at once. I was busy—you don't know what a business it is getting married. I had no time to think of you. I came the first moment I could. And I couldn't answer all your letters, so I answered none, not to make you jealous. See? When are we going to have tea? I didn't see any signs of it down-stairs?

LUCY. My dear Lydia, it is only just half-past four.

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, it is quite time tea was up. This *is* a muddly house !

FRED (*sarcastically*). You see, dear, since we lost the benefit of your supervision——

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, you *have* let yourselves go since I married ! (*Sitting down.*) Lucy, don't suck your thimble ! Toosie, don't waggle about like that, you make me feel quite ill. What were you singing when I came in ? Go on with it. (*TOOSIE obediently begins to intone Schön Rohtraut.*) Sing up !

TOOSIE (*shutting the piano with a bang*). It's no good. I can't sing to *you*.

MRS. MUNDAY (*seriously*). My dear child, you do not suppose it's any pleasure to *me* to listen to you ! I only thought I might give you a hint or two. I consider Fräulein Strumpf a *perfect* fool. Please, don't sit winding your leg round and round the piano stool in that idiotic way. Try to put your shoulders in. Poor child, you're at the awkward age——

TOOSIE. I'm not !

MRS. MUNDAY. Appearances are against you, then ! (*A head is put in at the door and hastily withdrawn.*) Why, that was Aunt Elspeth ! Why didn't she come in and see Me ?

FRED. Probably daren't affront you in her old cap.

MRS. MUNDAY. I saw it. Really, Lucy, you should dress Aunt Elspeth more decently. It's your business, you are the one at home now—you must really acquire some sense of responsibility . . . Where's mother?

LUCY. Out. Why didn't you say you were coming?

MRS. MUNDAY. How is she?

LUCY. Not very well, poor dear. She had one of her attacks yesterday and it left her so weak. She wants a great deal of care.

MRS. MUNDAY. Give it, then. But old people are always in a terrible hurry to consider themselves invalids, you know. It is the greatest mistake to coddle any one. I never do. You look rather seedy, Lucy. You want iron, child.

LUCY. Oh, I'm not ill. I've got rather a colour, I think.

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, you have—but it's yellow! That reminds me,—I wish you would let me have that Empire muslin dress Aunt Elspeth gave you. It is the only thing of yours that I admire, and I know exactly how to arrange it—I see it all——

LUCY. But I want it myself.

MRS. MUNDAY. My dear girl, you can't possibly go on wearing it. It is far too young for you!

LUCY (*outraged*). Well, I like that ! you are two years older than me !

MRS. MUNDAY. How funny ! I seemed to think it was the other way. Besides, I'm married. An old girl makes a young married woman (*laughing*). Well, now what about that dress ?— (FRED goes out. TOOSIE follows him.)

LUCY. We'll see. (*Earnestly*.) Lydia, I do want to consult you. Be an angel and tell me how to alter my *chiffon*, the one I wore at the Malorys'—you know ?

MRS. MUNDAY. I have forgotten it. Is it rather an ugly shade of magenta ?—and are the sleeves too small ?—and is it too short ?

LUCY. Yes, it was a failure, but it is *such* a good silk. How shall I have it done ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Let me see ! Well—if it was me, I should go in for those full pleats—but then, for a short dumpy figure like yours—let me see !—oh, do it—do it anyhow !

LUCY (*crossly*). What's the good of that ? You are not helping me a bit, and I must wear it at the Wilkinsons' on Tuesday, and I've worn it once there already—and my "new" won't have come home by then—and I did so want to look nice—

MRS. MUNDAY. Keep calm ! I suppose Mr. St. Jerome is to be there ?

LUCY. Yes—perhaps.

MRS. MUNDAY. My dear child, I wouldn't dress to him—I really wouldn't. It's such utter waste of time. And you know you're getting on, you ought really to be getting something settled! . . . Why not give your mind to Woffle? He would make a very nice little husband.

LUCY. Never, never! Why, you refused him yourself!

MRS. MUNDAY (*reflectively*). Did I? I had forgotten. It was ages ago, when I was quite young. You are twenty-six, Lucy.

LUCY (*hastily*). Twenty-four.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, it's all the same. A girl is as old as she looks, and I really don't think you'll do better—you haven't at all a good way with men—you can't snub them. Look at me! (LUCY regards her with awe.) I know exactly how to manage them. Now you are as civil to men as if they were women. I declare you haven't the spirit to cut a dance, or to tell a man you haven't got one left when you have a dozen. That is the only way to—

LUCY (*piteously*). I can't help it, Lydia.

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't whine. You can't alter yourself, of course. People are born different. But about St. Jerome—take my advice, and leave off thinking about him! It's no use! You're not at all the kind of woman he cares for.

LUCY (*pettishly*). I don't care two pins about him,—but he sat a whole hour in the conservatory with me at the Wilkinsons'.

MRS. MUNDAY. More shame for you! I suppose there weren't many people there he knew. But he doesn't care for you in that way one little bit and never will. You are not—— Now, what's the matter? (LUCY *leaves the room in tears*.) That girl wants iron—she's quite hysterical. (Re-enter FRED.) Well, Freddikins! How long are you up from Manchester for?

FRED. As long as I like—and I never allow anybody to call me by a nickname, please, Lydia. I am a little too old for that sort of thing.

MRS. MUNDAY. 'Pity you look so deplorably young then. I wonder anybody trusts you on the Stock Exchange. (*Sitting down on the arm of his chair and rifling his pockets*.) Hallo, a photograph! Let's see! It's no good your trying to stop me, Fred.

FRED. I see it isn't, short of tearing the things to bits.

MRS. MUNDAY (*looking at the photograph*). What a comic face! First of all you think she's all nose—till you look again and see she's all mouth! She seems to be holding it open for her eyes to drop into. And what enormous ears!

FRED (*bitterly*). You haven't left her a feature to stand on.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, I dare say her feet are big enough. Who is it?

FRED (*sulkily*). It's a girl in Manchester.

MRS. MUNDAY. She is holding a violin.

FRED. She happens to be a musician.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, does she? What's her name? Don't be so reserved. (*To TOOSIE, who re-enters the room.*) What is the name of this new flame of Fred's, Toosie?

TOOSIE (*eagerly*). Is it Miss Annabel Lee? She's a great swell in Manchester. Fred goes to all her concerts; don't you, Fred?

FRED (*enthusiastically*). She is quite young—only twenty-two—but I really do think, Lydia, she's got a brilliant future.

MRS. MUNDAY (*coldly*). I don't know about a brilliant future, but I should say she had got a shady past—to judge from that face.

FRED. What do you mean?

MRS. MUNDAY. A regularly bad face. And hopelessly common, too. Don't introduce her to me whatever you do—I wouldn't know her.

FRED. She probably wouldn't know you—except that you are my sister! (*Leaves the room, banging the door.*)



MRS. MUNDAY (*innocently, looking round*). What is the matter with them all, I wonder? Why have they all gone away? (*Tea is brought in.*) And why does Fred carry this musical girl's photograph about in his pocket?

TOOSIE (*bluntly*). He is in love with her. I'm not sure he isn't engaged to her—there!

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't say "there"—it's vulgar. Since when is Fred engaged? And why wasn't I told?

TOOSIE. What's the good of telling you things? You always find out, you know.

MRS. MUNDAY. Go and bring Fred back at once. I must speak to him.

TOOSIE. I don't suppose he will give you the chance—he's gone out. He's in an awful rage with you for what you said about Annabel.

MRS. MUNDAY. Maniac! Where's Lucy?

TOOSIE. Lying on her bed, with her eyes regularly bunged up with crying. I've just seen her. She won't be fit to go to the Lyceum tonight, and she had looked forward to it! It's a horrid shame of you! (*With violence.*) Look here, I wish you had stayed away on your horrid honeymoon and not come back to bully us all and make our lives miserable. There's Fred—you've driven him out of the house! There's mother—she couldn't be more afraid of any one than she is of

you, unless it's the cook ! There's Lucy—you've spoiled her eyes for the rest of the evening. I can't think why people keep hateful married sisters to plague them ! You're the family fiend, that's what you are ! Do stay away and plague your own husband, we don't want you ! Now I am going to Lucy—poor thing ! Good-bye. I hope you've enjoyed yourself—you needn't hurry to come again. (*Exit.*)

MRS. MUNDAY. What a family ! (*Rings the bell.*) Call a hansom, please ! . . . I don't think I'll stay for tea.

SCENE VII

FERDINAND MUNDAY'S *Studio*. MRS. MUNDAY
opens the door and looks in.

MRS. MUNDAY. You sent for me, Ferdinand? What is it? I'm in a tremendous hurry.

MUNDAY. Oh well, then, it doesn't matter! (*Turns back to his easel.*)

MRS. MUNDAY (*hesitating*). Well, not such a very particular hurry. I am only arranging about the house-warming. What was it?

MUNDAY (*appealingly*). Come and sit for one of these heads in the background! Peggy Merridew is late, and I can't get on.

MRS. MUNDAY (*approaching lazily*). I am not sure I *can* condescend to sit for a figure in the background. And Peggy Merridew is always late! How you do spoil your models, Ferdinand!

MUNDAY. How do I?

MRS. MUNDAY. You pay them exorbitantly, and all the same whether they come or not, and then when they do come, you hardly look at them,

but work away out of your own head. I don't see what an idealist wants with models at all.

MUNDAY. I am an idealist, am I? What is your idea of an idealist?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, a man who paints a woman turning into a snake before one's very eyes must be an idealist, must not he?

MUNDAY. Say a realist.

MRS. MUNDAY. Women are not snakes, Ferdinand. That is an old exploded idea, just like that other silly one about women being capricious and all that. It is not true. Men are the inconstant sex. Not you, dear. And there is no need to pay models. There are dozens of pretty society women that I know of, dying to sit to you for nothing. Why not employ them?

MUNDAY (*laughing*). Would not you be jealous?

MRS. MUNDAY (*contemptuously*). I wouldn't be anything so commonplace! Jealousy is the foible of all artists' wives. Really, if you can get models for nothing, for your *beaux yeux*—you have rather nice eyes, Ferdinand—why pay Peggy Merridews? —isn't that her stupid name?

MUNDAY. The Peggy Merridews are not as pretty as the society women perhaps, but they know their business thoroughly.

MRS. MUNDAY. Anybody can sit.

MUNDAY (*with meaning*). Try!

MRS. MUNDAY. Presently. I want to have a look at "Lamia." . . . Well, I can't say I care much for that old woman in the foreground.

MUNDAY. That's a man—the sage Apollonius.

MRS. MUNDAY. Old men always look such old women in pictures! And is the snaky part of Lamia under the table, like a mermaid's tail?

MUNDAY (*eagerly*). Don't you remember the scene, when the philosopher entered—

"The myrtle sickened in a thousand wreaths—
By faint degrees voice, lute, and pleasure ceased."

and then—

. . . "the bride's face, where now no azure vein
Wandered on fair spaced temples, no soft bloom
Misted the cheek, no passion to illume
The deep recessed vision!"—

How does it go on?

"Lamia no longer fair . . ."

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, Ferdinand, do stop spouting Keats. I wonder how long you could keep it up? . . . Well (*taking his arm and standing in front of the picture*), Lamia looks rather like a dish of snap-dragon. The light ought to be coaxed a little bit more to the left. It makes her nose look red. And that tone on the arm needs to be stronger. It is too misty and vague—Cossie

Davenant says your fault is a tendency to vagueness—make it out more! Is that what you call glazing? It is very ineffective. You should work up those shadows—they don't look solid—

MUNDAY (*smiling*). Any more advice?

MRS. MUNDAY (*calmly*). No, I think I have said what I think.

MUNDAY. Then, dear, will you give me an opportunity of putting your precepts into practice? Get up! (*Handing her on to the estrade.*)

MRS. MUNDAY. Now mind you don't make it like me!

MUNDAY. Why not?

MRS. MUNDAY. I don't want people to say I sit for my husband, and for one of the inferior heads too. (*A pause.*) I wish you would paint me properly.

MUNDAY. I don't paint you improperly, I hope.

MRS. MUNDAY. I mean me, *me*, ME!—a portrait!

MUNDAY. Mrs. Hugo Malory asked me the very same question the other day. What do you think I answered? I said, "Lydia is the prettiest woman in London—and the most unpaintable!"

MRS. MUNDAY. I consider that rather a compliment than not. It means that I dress properly, and don't allow my partiality for you to affect

my judgment. It means that I look French, and fashionable——

MUNDAY. And new and startling to the verge of crudeness. Do you know your colours always *just* don't set my teeth on edge, Lydia?

MRS. MUNDAY. They would be more fashionable if they just did. Besides, what can an artist know of colour—dress colour, I mean? As for fit —why, one and all, your idea is to make a woman look as if she had a bad dressmaker and no figure at all. Still, you might do a head of me in evening dress. It's such waste——

MUNDAY. To have an artist on the premises and make no use of him, you mean? However, it would not really be economical, for I couldn't sell you, you know.

MRS. MUNDAY. Why not?

MUNDAY. Would you like anybody who chose to pay for it, to have your portrait?

MRS. MUNDAY. You could soon do another. As long as you have me, what difference would it make? What we have got to do is to get on——

MUNDAY. I should get on better if you would sit still, dear.

MRS. MUNDAY. It is so difficult——

MUNDAY. I thought anybody could do it! But it is really very good of you——

(*A pause. He becomes absorbed.*)

MRS. MUNDAY. Well . . . I went to see them all at home yesterday.

MUNDAY. Oh—ah!

MRS. MUNDAY. They miss me quite dreadfully. Lucy is ruining the servants, and Toosie is getting quite unbearably cheeky. Fred's in love. He often is. A Manchester girl. It's not serious, but I must look after him a bit.

MUNDAY. And how did Lucy and the others account for never coming to see you all this time?

MRS. MUNDAY. Letters miscarried, or something of that sort! You are not attending to a word I say!

MUNDAY. Yes, I am. Go on. What else?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, the cook's leaving—and that tiresome Lucy won't marry Mr. Woffle.

MUNDAY. Woffle! Woffle! Do I know Woffle? Why should Lucy marry Woffle? The name's enough. Why won't she—apart from the name?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, she says he proposed to me first. I dare say he did, but what does that matter? He's a Q.C.

MUNDAY. And you refused him?

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh yes! . . . But then Lucy is not likely to have many offers. She is rather—so—too insignificant.

MUNDAY. I should leave Lucy's affairs alone if I were you.

MRS. MUNDAY. Nonsense, Ferdinand! What is the good of a married sister if she doesn't advise? And I hate giving advice if it isn't taken. Mr. Woffle would make her a very nice little husband.

MUNDAY. But could she love Mr. Woffle?

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, anybody can love anybody if they try!

MUNDAY. Is that your philosophy? Had you to try very hard in my case?

MRS. MUNDAY. If you kiss me I shall lose my pose!

MUNDAY. Do you suppose you have not lost it a hundred times over? Do try to be quiet, if you want the picture to be a success.

MRS. MUNDAY. I do! . . . I'll think of my new dress.

(*A pause.*)

MUNDAY. Doesn't it fit? Because you look too dreadfully sad.

MRS. MUNDAY. How can I help looking sad if you won't let me talk?

MUNDAY. All right! Chatter away as much as you like, only don't mind if my replies are a little vague, will you?

MRS. MUNDAY. I certainly shall not talk if you don't mean to listen. (*A pause.*) Ferdinand, I wish you would tell me—I can't quite remember—what is our exact income?

MUNDAY. Did you ever know it?

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course I knew, I made a point of knowing, but I've forgotten, somehow.

MUNDAY. And I am sure I don't remember. Look at that nail in the wall, will you?

MRS. MUNDAY. Please, Ferdinand, don't put me off. I want to know.

MUNDAY. Why should you trouble your little head about it?

MRS. MUNDAY. Ferdinand, my head is not little ; it is a very good head for business, father used to say, and I do so dislike that patronizing way of speaking to women ! Things are changed. We are not dolls and idiots and slaves any more.

MUNDAY. You certainly are not.

MRS. MUNDAY. I'm not a fool, and I hate to be patronized, even by you, Ferdinand ; and I do think *one* of us ought to take an intelligent interest in money matters.

MUNDAY (*setting his palette carefully*). Let it be you, dear. I hate business.

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, I know ; that's what I meant. It isn't in your line. You are a genius.

MUNDAY. Thank you !

MRS. MUNDAY. And geniuses are supposed to live in the clouds, and not trouble themselves about every-day matters. You idealize—

MUNDAY. And you realize !

MRS. MUNDAY. I don't know if you have noticed it, but I am an exceedingly practical woman!

MUNDAY. What, with that fluffy hair?

MRS. MUNDAY. Do be serious, Ferdinand, and listen to me.

MUNDAY. I am listening.

MRS. MUNDAY. Nonsense! you are not attending a bit. Tell me exactly what you make in a year?

MUNDAY. I don't know, exactly.

MRS. MUNDAY. Then you ought to know, or I ought. Well, shall we put it at a thousand pounds?

MUNDAY. Sweet little Philistine! No artist worthy of the name has a settled income. We live by windfalls. One year I don't sell an inch of canvas. My works litter up the studio or scour the country to exhibitions; the next year I clear the lot and pay two or three thousand pounds into my banker's. It is all a matter of chance. I never know if I'm a prince or a pauper.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ah, but the chances are you will be a prince. You are an awfully rising man, sure to succeed, or else I should not have been allowed to marry you.

MUNDAY. An improving property, am I?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, dear, let's be business-

like and strike an average. Nothing, or nearly nothing, one year, and two thousand the next. Average income, a thousand a year?

MUNDAY. That sounds plausible. Who taught you to do sums in your head? Turn it a little more to the right, by the way.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, do listen, Ferdinand! I don't often get a chance of talking to you about this horrid dry old business. I am sure it bores me dreadfully.

MUNDAY. Then drop it!

MRS. MUNDAY. No, dear, it's important.

MUNDAY (*carelessly*). Then go on, if it amuses you.

MRS. MUNDAY. It doesn't amuse me—but—you see, father was on the Stock Exchange, and naturally he thought and talked a good deal about finance; and so does Fred, and the Blandford Square cousins—you know them!

MUNDAY (*dabbling on his palette*). Vaguely. Well?

MRS. MUNDAY. They all talk and think a good deal about—about—

MUNDAY. About money? How dreary!

MRS. MUNDAY. Not exactly money—about stocks, and shares, and contango—

MUNDAY. Contango! What a pretty word! Do you know what it means?

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course. I was brought up among all that sort of thing. They talked of nothing else.

MUNDAY. What? In the family circle?

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course, just as you artists talk of colours, and varnishes, and brushes, and canvases—

MUNDAY. But we don't! We would die sooner!

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, then, you should, and then you would be less cheated by your colourman! But, as I was saying, we girls—

MUNDAY. Did you and Lucy curl your hair with contango, and go to bed on dreams of omnium? I don't know a bit what it all means, but go on talking—your expression is capital.

MRS. MUNDAY. But isn't it fortunate that we do know something of business—that I do, at least?

MUNDAY. I don't see that it will do you much good; but go on—why is it fortunate?

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't you see how well it all fits in? There are you, an improvident man of genius; here am I, a practical woman of business, ready to take care of our money matters, and save you the trouble, and the tiresome details—

MUNDAY (*looking at her gravely for a moment*). You want to hold the purse-strings? Oh, all right! I suppose it is an inherited instinct with

you. Go ahead, only don't move your head for a moment. You are splendid just like that.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ferdinand, you are not attending a bit!

MUNDAY. I am not, particularly. Do excuse me—this is a most ticklish moment. Keep still . . .

MRS. MUNDAY. You know, dear, by the terms of my father's will, I have absolute control over my own money . . . ?

MUNDAY. All right! . . . It is coming splendidly!

MRS. MUNDAY. Do you happen to know how much it was, dear Ferdinand?

MUNDAY. How much was what? Your fortune? I don't remember, exactly, at the moment.

MRS. MUNDAY. I think I do. Fifty thousand pounds, which were invested in Indian Fours, when they stood at par, and consequently producing a yearly two thousand pounds.

MUNDAY (*laughing*). What a head you have! If ever there is a female Ministry I shall vote for your being Chancellor of the Exchequer—that is, if you women leave us a vote. You'll get yours, of course, as things are going on.

MRS. MUNDAY. No, thank you, Ferdinand, I don't want to vote. I can do very well as I am. One man is quite enough for any woman to

manage. Do attend ! You see, my money amounts to just two-thirds of our whole joint income, calculating your share of it at the average which you yourself have given me—

MUNDAY. Have I given you any average ? I haven't the least idea what I have been saying. But you seem able to think for two. Well, what then ? Head a little up !

MRS. MUNDAY. Is that right ?

MUNDAY. Capital ! Are you sure you are not tired ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Not at all. I'm getting on very nicely. Well, as I was saying, poor dear father said to me a little time before he died, "Lydia, look here ; you are a sensible young woman ; you have known about money ever since you were a baby, and you are going to marry one of those artist fellows—he didn't know you then particularly, Ferdinand, you know—and he will go and put all your money into a red-brick house . . ."

MUNDAY. On the contrary, it was *you* who insisted on putting *me* into a red-brick house.

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, I did. I know artists *must* live in red-brick houses . . . "He will quarrel with the dealers or the critics"—these are father's words, not mine, you know—"or go off his head, or come to grief somehow if you don't look

after him . . ." Father was a little rough sometimes, but he always spoke to the point.

MUNDAY. Very pointed! One might say blunt—

MRS. MUNDAY (*pouting*). I wish I hadn't told you; but I wanted to get something settled—I wanted you to understand—

MUNDAY. Oh yes, I understand, I think. You want to have the entire control of our income, don't you? As it's chiefly yours, I see no reason for objecting. Well, let it be so. I'll hand you over my cheques as I get them . . . Meantime do sit still for a little, dear, or are you tired?

MRS. MUNDAY (*assuming an expression of intense weariness*). Very!

MUNDAY. Poor child! Get down. Artists are brutes!

MRS. MUNDAY. And I haven't arranged about the house-warming. When can you let me have the studio?

MUNDAY. When? What? You want to turn me out of my work-room?

MRS. MUNDAY. The twenty-eighth or the thirtieth—which suits you best?

MUNDAY. Both equally badly.

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, the thirtieth suits me best—

MUNDAY. But— (*There is a knock at the door.*)

MRS. MUNDAY. Here's the model! I shall go. Please, Ferdinand, don't make difficulties about the studio. We took this house on purpose—

MUNDAY. Did we? But I—

MRS. MUNDAY. Now you are going to be tiresome, after I have been so nice to you!

MUNDAY. Oh—all right—do as you like! I'll hire a barn. (*Enter the model.*) Go and put on your dress at once, Miss Merridew. You are shamefully late!

MRS. MUNDAY. Good-bye, Ferdinand. Haven't I been useful to you! (*Aside, as she goes out.*) It's not bad business sitting to Ferdinand, one gets something settled!

* * * * *

(*The model comes in from the dressing-room and takes up her position. MUNDAY paints in silence. She turns and turns a diamond ring on her finger.*)

MUNDAY (*suddenly*). Hullo, Peggy, who has been giving you diamonds?

THE MODEL (*with dignity*). The person, sir, who has the best right to do so. (*Enters into a long explanation.*)

* * * * *

MRS. MUNDAY (*coming in, after lunch, two hours later*). What's the matter, Ferdinand? You look fearfully cross.

MUNDAY. My picture is done for! Peggy Merridew is going to be married.

MRS. MUNDAY. How very wrong! How dare she?

MUNDAY. Well, it's not exactly an immoral proceeding, is it? If she would only go through her dozen more sittings, I could pass it over.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, make her go on!

MUNDAY. Can't. Had no bond. These models have us in their power. She sails for America in ten days.

MRS. MUNDAY. She's a hideous little toad, with a mouth like a church door.

MUNDAY. It is a beautiful mouth—a tragic mouth. It is just her mouth I can't do without.

MRS. MUNDAY. I know a dozen prettier, any day.

MUNDAY. Yours, for instance! But if it isn't the mouth one wants—to paint! Peggy's is unique.

MRS. MUNDAY. Unique! I saw a girl somewhere with a mouth like that—the other day—just like that—do let me remember!

MUNDAY (*fretfully*). And if you do remember it will make no difference. You can't go up to a stranger and ask her to sit.

MRS. MUNDAY. Can't I though? If I knew—if I could remember—? (*A pause.*) I have it! Don't you worry, Ferdinand. You've married a

sensible woman. Kiss me! (*Glancing at the picture on the easel.*) Upon my word, I don't see how you can admire me and that picture at the same time.

MUNDAY. I am not sure I do admire my own picture. One has moments of self-distrust. Confess *you* hate it?

MRS. MUNDAY. I like Tissot's things. But there is no need for *me* to admire your pictures; it is for the people who buy them, and so long as they're pleased——! The only thing *I* care about, is to see them finished and out of the studio . . . and you don't turn out half enough pictures, Ferdinand, now when you are the fashion. Why don't you knock 'em off?—one a week?—I'm sure you could, easily. But you are so frightfully conscientious! However, that's your way, and far be it from me to interfere with you. Good-bye! Paint nicely! What are you shaking your head about? (*Exit.*)

* * * * *

MUNDAY (*sighing*). Poor girl! . . . She's quite hopelessly outside it all! . . .

SCENE VIII

"AH, there you are ! What a crowd, isn't it ? My husband ? Oh, he isn't here, he hates Private Views. It is no place for an artist! . . . No, I haven't been round yet. Too much effort . . . The Prime Minister in the next room, you say, Evelyn ? Well, what then ? I am not going to help to mob him . . . Where *is* your picture, Mr. Talbot ? The third room ? I shall certainly go and look at it . . . Mr. Davenant, do look after Nevill. I'm supposed to be taking care of her, and I've lost her. You want to stay with me ? Oh no, you can't. I'm tired of you. Besides, I want to talk to Mr. St. Jerome. Mr. St. Jerome, I haven't seen you for an age."

Lydia Munday had taken up her position in the world. I looked at her critically as she stood there, calm, smiling, reposeful in the fussy crowd, and marvelled at the cleverness with which the little Philistine of Bedford Square had caught the tone of *blasé* indifference which distinguishes

the hardened Private Viewer of many seasons. I had reason to believe that it was her first.

"Oh, I'm so happy!" she said joyously. I thought she was alluding to the success of her husband's picture, of which every one was talking, but she soon disabused me. "I am quite the best-dressed woman in the room."

"Your husband's design?" said I.

"Ferdinand! He couldn't design a *chic* dress if he tried. No, Madame Cromer."

"Not *the* Madame Cromer?"

"Why not? I can afford it. I've simply frozen to her. She's more a friend than a dressmaker."

"Well, the dress is certainly a remarkable success. So is the 'Lamia,' by the way."

"Yes, and I left Ferdinand in a dreadful state of despondency about it."

"Ought not some one to go and reassure him?"

"Are you suggesting that I should leave this festive scene, and rush back to Ferdinand with the news? Oh, it will keep very well till I go home in due course. It isn't as if we had sold it, though I hope I *shall* sell it . . . Do you know many people here? You may point them out to me, but unobtrusively, please, I don't want to be supposed to be a lady-journalist whom you are feeding with 'copy.' That's the correct term, isn't

it? I got it from Nevill . . . Who is that death's head over there crowned with flowers?"

"One of the noblest women in the world——"

"I thought she might be a celebrity . . . Just look at May Bowen doing her hair in the glass of Tadema's picture! As if that hat ever *could* suit her in this world! . . . She's coming this way! Talk to me."

"Mrs. Bowen! But she used to be your dearest friend."

"Dearest friends make the best enemies. I don't want to be bothered by her just now. And who is this?"

"Miss Grant. She paints."

"Ah, that accounts for the fit of her jacket, poor thing!"

"Some people think her the coming woman."

"Every other woman in the room, nearly, has been described as that to me. Coming women will soon be a drug in the market. And who is this Vision of Sin in mud-colour? Another C.W.?"

"That is Mrs. Simpatica Maple-Durham. She's writing a novel—a tremendous affair, they say. The story of herself and her husbands. I forget if it's two or three."

"The novel of the future can only be written by a woman with a past, I see," said Lydia. "Mrs. Maple-Durham seems quite wasteful of husbands.

She is a Bohemian, I suppose. I hate Bohemians. They are only *bourgeois* with the bloom off. They are no cleverer than the others, and they neither tub nor say their prayers. And Bohemia is played out—not the fashion now! . . . No, Evelyn. I have not seen your mother for at least twenty minutes. Try to bear up. No one will eat you."

"Shall I try to find her for you?" I said to the forlorn young lady. She accepted my offer, but I lost her at the very next group, and came back to Mrs. Munday, who was talking to a friend of her husband's, the earnest and philanthropic Verschoyle.

"What do I think of the show? Well, not much. I never saw so many dowdy people in my life. The pictures, you mean? Oh, I shall come and look at *them* another time. Lots of pretty people? Oh yes! Mrs. Bowen? I think she is quite lovely, and that white bonnet suits her to perfection! . . . What did you do that for?" she remarked to me, when Verschoyle had passed on.

"Do what?"

"Help Evelyn Ward to find the chaperon she had just succeeded in losing! That's only her pose. She is always lost and gone before—out of her mother's way."

"And allow me to ask *you* what you meant by raving about Mrs. Bowen to Verschoyle?"

"Policy, dear friend! One must always say other women are pretty when one is asked, or else people think one is jealous."

"Does that rule hold good with our sex, I wonder?"

"It is a rule you all neglect, at any rate. Cossie Davenant is always abusing you."

"What are you doing with Cossie Davenant, may I ask? Training him up in the way he should not go?"

She beamed.

"I am the only person who has any influence over him—absolutely. He says so himself."

"What does Lady Fulham say?"

"She can't thank me enough! You know it is the very best thing in the world for a boy to be taken up by a young married woman, who will let him talk to her, and confide in her, and who will take the trouble to advise him, and have the heart to snub him when he needs it."

"Indeed I don't think any young man would receive an *éducation sentimentale* at your hands."

"You think not?" said she, laughing. "At any rate I help to raise his standard of female excellence—give him an ideal, and keep him out of the society of actresses and—ladies one knows

by name rather than by reputation, don't you know! I am sure I am very kind to allow him to bore me, poor boy."

"Are you sure you are not kind only to be cruel?"

"Do you mean he might fall in love with me?" said she, with great directness. "Well, that wouldn't hurt him! . . . Do you see that girl over there, with Cossie Davenant—in a shockingly ill-fitting blue gown? It pains Cossie very much."

"Never mind the gown. The girl inside it is lovely. Strangely like the principal figure in your husband's 'Lamia,' too!"

"No wonder, when she sat for it. That is Nevill France. Ferdinand admires her tremendously. He did, the first moment he saw her—so did you! Don't you remember—the Burne-Jones girl—at the theatre—a month or two ago?"

"I vaguely remember. Is she a model, then?"

"No, not a model, exactly, but a regular Bohemian—such a character! Take me up to tea, and I will tell you how I picked her up. It *was* funny. How cross Cossie will be!" she murmured delightedly, as we went up-stairs and secured a table whence we could look down over the balcony on to the crowd below. "There he is, with Nevill, looking for me. He can't stand her, she's too young for him. But I brought her,

so I told him off to look after her. I have taken her up, you know."

"She makes a capital foil!"

"Yes, did you ever see such a dress, and such a way of doing her hair? Exactly like a Burne-Jones picture. She was most nice about it, poor girl, and quite willing to alter it, as she was going out with me. But I decided it was better to let her stick to her own style. 'My dear Nevill,' I said, 'your style is "flop," and you wouldn't look right in ordinary civilized dress. Do just stay as you are,' and she did."

"I am glad of it," I said. "She looks like an angel."

"Like an actress, I think," said Lydia, "but her manners are quite nice. I wonder where she got them? She has no style, of course—how could she have? She admires *me*—tries to copy *me*. It's rather pathetic. I'm really quite fond of her, and she's so useful about the house, poor little thing!"

"Poor little thing! She's the tallest woman in the room. You mean poor and unconnected, I suppose. But tell me all about it and how you discovered her?"

"Oh, my descent into Bohemia! . . . Well, you must know, Ferdinand's favourite model actually deserted him to get married, the other day, and there wasn't another mouth like hers in London

—at least Ferdinand said so. But I remembered that girl at the theatre, and I promised Ferdinand I would unearth her for him, and I did. I have the cheek of the devil, Ferdinand says. If you remember, we noticed her go back to the door that led into the stage, as we went out, and the pew-opener—I mean the *ouvreuse*—that let her through called her ‘Dear —’ ”

“They all do that.”

“Well, I concluded she was going behind to see Mrs. Marischal; and as Cossie knows the Marischals—Cossie knows all sorts of queer people—I got him to find out all about her for me, and he did. She was a Miss Hester Nevill France, and she lived at 10, Talgarth Mansions, Waterloo Road.”

“And how did that advance you?”

“I went at once, and dug her out.”

“Without knowing her?”

“I want to get Ferdinand on, and a good model is half the battle. Well, to proceed—I didn’t know where in the waste places and ends of the earth the Waterloo Road was, but I put on a perfectly plain dress—”

“I see, so as not to startle Bohemia with your magnificence—and not too much loose cash in your pocket—and you left your watch at home,—lest you should be robbed !”

"It's better to be careful! . . . Well, I found Talgarth Mansions, and I read her name in a rack below. I went straight up. There were horrid macadam stairs, and lots of babies sprawling on them, and dreadful slipshod women kept putting their heads out and staring at me . . . and then it got quite dark, and I fell over a coal-scuttle, and a man came out with a pipe and asked me what the devil I wanted? He *must* have been a Socialist. I never saw one near before. Then, at the very top—I nearly sat down on the stairs, only it might have dirtied my dress—I found a door and a can of milk in front of it, and a label pinned to the knocker, 'Not at home till six.' It was five then."

"That ought to have been enough for you."

"Not at all! I wasn't going to be beaten. I had come to see her, and I meant to see her. I thought most likely she was only shamming, so I knocked. There was a little scuffle inside—and she actually opened the door herself. It was too dark for her to see me properly. I said 'Miss France, I believe?'—and she said 'Yes?'—questioningly, you know. I think she was a little ashamed of being seen in an old frock. And then I said that I had come on rather a curious errand, but I hoped she would forgive the intru-

sion when she knew what it was—all in my best manner, you know!"

"And did she ask you to come in?"

"I can't say she exactly invited me—she was rather stand-offish at first—but I managed to insinuate myself past her—little thin slip of a thing—and there I was in the drawing-room—by courtesy! It was what they call a self-contained flat—very self-contained! There wasn't room to swing a cat—does anybody ever want to swing a cat? But it was extremely clean—much cleaner than I expected—with only a charwoman to come in once a day—she has no servant. But there were horrible pliable picnic chairs, and a lamp that smelt, and little unframed pictures on the walls, and school-room bookcases hanging to strings. I don't suppose the whole turn-out came to more than ten pounds. Her bedroom was a mere cupboard—I told her it wanted ventilation."

"It's a strong measure, isn't it, to go to the house of a girl you did not know, and insist on going in, and examining everything, and finding fault with everything? There isn't a man would dare do it."

"I dare say not," said she contemptuously. "Men always get women to do their dirty work for them! It is a little way they have. Ferdinand

wanted her, so I got her for him. But it wasn't easy to persuade the child, I can tell you. Oh no! she was not a professional model—and she had been asked to sit a hundred times, and had always refused—hadn't time. But I buttered her up, and told her how I admired her style—if style it can be called, that style is none—and explained to her what a compliment it was for an artist in Ferdinand's position to want to paint her——"

"Did she know his work?"

"She pricked up her ears and showed some interest when I mentioned his name—remembered a picture of his, exhibited two years ago, before we were married—the *Aucassin et Nicolette*—it made some stir at the time! She remembered it better than I did. I always thought it a silly sentimental thing, as if a woman was likely to go walking about barefoot on the wet grass under any circumstances whatever! . . . And then we began to talk, and she gradually unfroze . . ."

"I fancy Ferdinand's was the name you conjured with."

"Oh no; she was only waiting for an opportunity to cave in, I had been so nice to her. I can be very 'haffable' when I like, as our old cook used to say. And I took a tender interest in her ugly old amateur mural decorations—gesso

or something—and her helpless dabs of paint she called water-colours. Then, when I rose to go, I said, to clinch the matter, ‘And you *will* come, won’t you?’ And she answered rather stiffly and stagily, ‘I shall be proud if I can be of any use to the painter of that picture.’ So we settled it, and she came, and she *wouldn’t* be paid, and I had to tell Ferdinand she *was* paid, and that it was an arrangement between me and her, or he wouldn’t have stood it, so don’t give me away! . . . Now let us go down-stairs again. I’m tired of tea. I will introduce you to Nevill, if you like, and relieve poor Cossie.”

“Thank you! Tell me, what is the honest employment from which you have abstracted Miss France? She is that modern anomaly, a working woman, I suppose?”

“She is an orphan, who has lost both parents. Her mother was half Italian. Yes, she earns her own living. She is by way of being secretary to the editor of some second-rate paper or other, and does odd bits of type-writing. But she thinks her vocation is the stage. She is great friends with Marischal of the Piccadilly Theatre. All I can say is, why does not he take her on if she’s good for anything? I don’t encourage her about her acting. I want to keep her for Ferdinand now. A good model is better than a second-rate actress, don’t you think?”

SCENE IX

"WHAT a thing it is to have a mouth that won't shut, and eyes like saucers!" said Mrs. Munday pensively, as she stood by her husband's easel in a costume that successfully defied every known law of harmony, and surveyed his rendering of "the Burne-Jones girl." "Then the artists all rave about you?"

"Quite so!" said Munday. "The artists rave about Nevill, and the smart people about you. So you're even. Keep a little way off, dear, or you'll spoil my eye . . . Where are you going?"

"I can't think why you never like my clothes, Ferdinand. I am supposed to dress very well. This is the new blue."

"Is it? It sears my eyeballs!"

"Ah, your eye is untrained. You have never been married before, have you? Where am I going? Eventually to the Fulhams' garden-party, and to drive first in the park, for my sins, with Mrs. Bonchurch. She is coming for me at three."

"The Gilded Pill!"

"It's a shame to call her that, because she's rich and ugly!"

"It was your own phrase, I think."

"Oh—well—of course it's clever ; but don't let it get about. We must keep in with Mrs. Bonchurch. She may be useful to us."

"I don't see how."

"She might ask you to paint her portrait."

"Heavens !"

"I really don't see why she shouldn't," said Mrs. Munday seriously. "She's very much inclined to have it done, if I could only bring her up to the scratch."

"Please don't try, for it would make me utterly miserable . . . By the way, Wigan wants the 'Lamia.'"

"I knew he would!" exclaimed Mrs. Munday triumphantly. "I was so civil to him at the private view the other day! Now, what have I said wrong?"

"I don't like it."

"Don't like what? Well, no more do I! If you think I enjoy being polite to snuffy old dealers and lumpy millionairesses for your sake—but I do it!"

"Don't do it then, please. I don't like my wife to go down into the arena and fight with h-less dealers and——"

"Somebody must."

"Not at all! There's no need! If an artist cannot get on without 'booming,' and all that sort of thing, he doesn't deserve to get on at all. Advertisement is the curse of the age."

"Curse or not, it is the one thing needful now-a-days. I defy any one to get on without it, even a beauty. Even a beauty has to be 'boomed' if she is to succeed at all. And as for an artist! I think it is very conceited of you, Ferdinand, to fancy that you, more than other artists, can afford to neglect the ordinary resources of business!"

"My business is to paint good pictures," said Munday resolutely, "and all the rest may go to the devil. I want to do some good work before I die."

"So you shall, dear," said Mrs. Munday, as if she were talking to a child. "Paint away and don't bother about practical matters. It isn't in your line. You were born a genius. Geniuses always go to the wall unless they have some one to look after them. You have got me. I'm awfully practical. I can go about and look after your interests. You seem to have got a good deal of that old silly stay-at-home harem ideal of women hanging about you still. That's all utterly exploded now. Women can do anything! You just paint the pictures, and I'll see that they sell. What did you ask for the 'Lamia'?"

"Five hundred."

"—Guineas?"

"I fancy I did not specify."

"Ferdinand!"

"What depths of moral condemnation!"

"Well, it *is* tiresome of you, Ferdinand."

"Dear," said he, with some slight hesitation,
"I have no doubt you are very clever and practical
and all that—"

"Well!"

"I had rather you kept out of that sort of thing.
Leave it to me, that's a good girl."

"As you please, Ferdinand. How old-fashioned
you are! Wigan will cheat you, of course—any-
body can cheat you. I don't wonder you have
never got rich! You are far too easy with people.
They don't love you a bit the more, and think you
a fool into the bargain . . . What is it?" to the
servant.

"Some flowers, ma'am, with Mr. Davenant's
compliments."

"That boy is becoming a perfect nuisance," said
she, taking them from the girl's hands.

"Abate him then." He had gone back to his
easel.

"I do. I am always taking him down pegs.
And yet he thinks me the most delightful woman
in London!"

"Of course, so do I," said her husband politely.

"Ah, but Cossie thinks so out loud."

"Pays you compliments, you mean . . . Ah, well!"

"Do you consider I flirt with him, Ferdinand?"

"I don't think about it, dear . . . Stand a little that way, out of the light."

"Why don't you think about it?"

"Haven't time!"

"You are a most confiding husband, I must say. You never even asked me why I didn't get back from Fourth of June on Monday last till ten o'clock?"

"I concluded you stopped and dined with my sister. She was of the Fulham party, wasn't she?"

"Yes, but I didn't come home with her."

"Didn't you?"

"Didn't she tell you I didn't? How very 'sporting' of her!"

"Geraldine isn't a gossip, thank heaven!"

"I sometimes think she isn't a woman at all!"

"She is a very good woman."

"Very good, almost a frump. Beg pardon, Ferdinand, I didn't say *quite* . . . Oh, she really is very good, and not a bit interfering. When I first married, she did try it on a bit. It was, 'If you ask me for my advice, dear—?' 'But I don't ask you!' I used to answer innocently, and she very

soon dropped it. Nobody has ever interfered with *me* successfully."

"Poor Geraldine only wanted to help you."

"Ah, but I didn't want help. I took hold of the ropes at once. Not but what I get on very well with Geraldine. I make a point of getting on well with all your people, Ferdinand, but I'm glad you did not give me a mother-in-law to grapple with. She had the good taste to die before I came on the scene."

"I was very fond of my mother," said Munday coldly.

"Oh yes, I know. You're a charming family. Though I confess I found Geraldine a little disappointing after what I expected. She's so very simple—not smart at all. There's not a bit of what Ouida calls 'patrician insolence' about her."

"Why should there be? She only married a law-lord."

"Ferdinand, why need you go and cry down your own family? How do you know I didn't marry you for your connections? . . . I didn't, dear, of course. I married you for your own sweet self. . . . Still, I wonder you don't want to hear all about my astonishing adventures on the Fourth of June—and who was my cavalier—and why I was so late home."

"You can tell me all about it if you like."

"No, it would bore you . . . What a time that woman is coming! Tell me, shall I wear Cossie's flowers?"

"It depends whether they go with your dress or not."

"That's just what I was thinking. I always sacrifice sentiment to expediency."

"Is there sentiment? . . . Dear me!"

"On his side I suppose there is, a little . . . I know you hate Cossie, Ferdinand."

"How can you tell?"

"Principally because you are so awfully polite to him."

"That is a very good way of concealing one's dislike, isn't it?"

"Ah, but you do, I know. Why don't you like him?"

"If you like him, it is enough."

"I do think, Ferdinand, it is most unreasonable of you," she said pettishly. "He is a very nice boy indeed—a little spoilt, perhaps, but a dear boy. What can you have against him?"

"Oh, don't let us talk about him."

"Ferdinand, you have only one fault."

"What is that?"

"You never will argue."

"Isn't it wiser not?"

"It is very insulting. Every one likes to say his say."

"I don't prevent you saying yours."

"One can't argue alone."

"I see," said he, laying down his brushes, and putting his hands on her shoulders. "You want your cues given you! But you will never get a man to see that. *I* can't. I would sooner give in. I can stand anything but a wrangle . . . Come, dear, you have married me, you must take me as I am."

"I suppose I must," said she. "Well, good-bye. Nevill is coming to sit, isn't she? She can stay dinner if she likes."

"Could not you—" said Munday, with some hesitation, "contrive to stay in sometimes when Miss France is sitting?"

"What for?"

"To chaperon her—a little."

"Well, this is the first time I ever heard of a model needing a chaperon!"

"Miss France is a lady as well as a model."

"A little type-writer girl—a second-rate actress! And look what a life that is! Not much chaperon about it! You know every actress has to let her manager kiss her before he'll even grant her an interview! You need not laugh. I have heard it is like that. One has to propitiate them. That is

what she would be doing if she was not sitting to you."

"I hope not," said Munday. "Still, if she really wants to go on the stage, we are doing her an injury by keeping her away from it. I have been thinking about it all, and—"

"Don't think, dear, paint. Nevill's acting is all in the vague. We don't even know that she can act, and she can pose, at any rate. The girl's far better off sitting to you and going out into respectable society with me sometimes, than slaving at home over a typing machine, or trotting about London interviewing managers and theatrical agencies. Besides, she's awfully useful to me. I couldn't do without her, simply."

"So long as she is happy . . . And, Lydia, I have never mentioned money to her, as you said it would hurt her feelings if I did, but you said *you* would make some arrangement with her about paying for the sittings. I hope that you have made it *very* much worth her while. Nothing would have induced me to accept her services otherwise."

"I know," said his wife, rising, and kissing him on the forehead.

"I can trust you," he said, putting up his hand to draw her face down to his. But she was gone.

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An hour later she was sitting under an ancestral oak on the Fulhams' lawn at Kensington, while one interesting or important person after another came and exchanged repartees with her. They called it "crossing a lance with Mrs. Munday."

"You never give me a chance of speaking to you," said the son of the house crossly, when at last the seat next her was vacant.

"I can talk to you at any time."

"And you have not put on the flowers I sent you!"

"They did not happen to go with my dress. Ferdinand is so particular about colours, he wouldn't hear of my wearing them . . . I am going home now, only I must speak to your mother first and tell her what a good boy you are! Where is she?"

"Over there. By the way, I was rather put to it last night. She wanted to know——"

"Mothers do."

"I had not the least idea what version you would wish me to give of our little Fourth of June escapade."

"When in doubt, tell the truth!" said she flippantly.

"But——"

"But what? There was nothing wrong about it, was there?"

"Do you mean I was to say that we lost Lady Nugent in the Playing Fields, and took no particular trouble to find her, and dawdled up to Windsor, and missed the train, and drove out to Datchet, and dined there, and came back by a later train——"

"Not all that, silly boy! No need to enter into so many details. Well, let us hear what excuse you *did* give your mother for our not turning up at Paddington with the rest."

"Oh, I said you and Lady Nugent had got parted from each other in the crowd at the match, and that you had gone back to the Provost's to see if she had waited there for you, and found she hadn't, and then I escorted you to the station, and found we were too late for the 5.50 train, and caught one at 7.30 by the South-Western."

"Your mother has got an A B C, I suppose."

"She would not be such a cad to look it out after I told her."

"Wouldn't she?" said Lydia incredulously. "Well, you know her best . . . I call that a very lame story of yours—not comprehensive enough. Too hard and fast! A lie should be large and adaptable, and allow a margin for alteration. It should overlap; you should not always have to be lifting a corner here, and stretching a point there, to make it fit. If you lie at all, lie boldly; I

detest half-measures, myself! . . . All right, I'll stick to your story, although I could have invented a far better one. Look here, I am sure these leaves are making arabesques all over my forehead. Let us move. Oughtn't you to go and talk to some of these people?"

"I'd rather talk to you."

"Of course you would. But how about me? Introduce me to some nice man. No, I don't see any nice man. I think I will go now . . ."

"You are rather unkind to me."

"Oh, you can come to us and dine. We've got some dull people coming."

SCENE X

"IT was such a pity, Ferdinand," said Mrs. Munday, a few days after, as she sat at lunch with her husband, "that you sold the 'Lamia' to old Wigan."

"He sold it the other day to Sir George Vyvyan."

"That is better. Now it will go to Glade, which is a show house. I meant a pity because Mr. Verschoyle wanted it—he tells me so every time he meets me. He would give a good price for it. I fancy he's a little in love with Nevill."

"Well . . . he can have Nevill herself, perhaps," said Munday, rather bitterly.

"You know that the silly child has got the idea of going on the stage so thoroughly into her head that she won't allow anything—not even marriage—to interfere with it."

"The stage may be her true vocation after all."

"It's a woman's vocation to be married," said Lydia. "Neither do I believe she *can* act . . . I have never even invited her to recite to me! I

am so afraid of being bored. But I always tell her there isn't a chance of her getting on as an actress—if it were only for practical reasons. She is taller than half the actor-managers in London, so they wouldn't venture to be seen with her on the stage; and she's prettier than the wives of the other half—so what chance has she? . . . However—*à propos* of Mr. Verschoyle—he was wondering if you couldn't do another 'Lamia' for him—smaller?"

"A replica? No, certainly not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—— No, you would never understand. Vyvyan would not like it."

"Why on earth should you consult him?"

"Look here, Lydia," said Munday gravely, "as you choose to interest yourself in these matters, you should try to look at them from the artist's point of view. Don't you know that an artist doesn't paint replicas—at any rate without asking leave of the owner of the initial picture, and as I know that in this case the owner would *not* consent——"

"I know that—but you might alter the detail a little, mightn't you?—so as to evade——"

Munday rose and went to the window.

"It will rain," he announced. "Are you going out to-day?"

"No, dear, I am going to sacrifice myself on the altar of family affection. Fred came up from Manchester yesterday, and he is coming to tea to-day. He has not seen my house yet—or me—since I married."

"Will your brother—will Fred stay to dinner?"

"Don't look so frightened, Ferdinand! No, I shan't even ask him. He wouldn't go well with the sideboard. Besides, Cossie is coming, and Fred would be awfully out of it."

"Not more than I shall be."

"Oh, I know you and Cossie are not particularly *simpatico*—but, after all, you meet on common ground; you are of the same world at least, whereas *my* family—well, they have all the civic virtues, no doubt, but neither you nor I have much to say to them, have we? I don't blame you, I feel it myself. I have grown out of them. Even when I lived in that world I was in it, not of it. They jarred upon me; their ways were not my ways. I'm not like them a bit—any of them—now am I? I'm not like mamma. I can't think how she ever came to marry papa! I'm sure I wouldn't have."

"I never knew a daughter yet who would have condescended to marry her own father!"

"Very well, then! Go along, dear, and paint immortal works, and leave me to deal with old

Fred. We understand each other. And he's head of the family—since papa died."

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An hour later she walked into the drawing-room, up to a tall young fellow who was standing with his back to her, his legs well apart, attentively contemplating an early Rossetti. He turned as she came in, and waved his hand.

"Well, do you know, Lyd, I don't think much of all this!" he remarked.

"'Nobody asked you, sir,' she said.' Sit down, and don't scrape your muddy boots along my carpet."

"Bide a wee, old girl, I must have a look round. Remember this is the first time I've seen your house, and you'll like to have my opinion ; I'm no end of a judge. In Manchester we go in for art, you know."

"I thought you went in only for cotton." Fred sniggered appreciatively. "You might take *me* first, and the house afterwards. You haven't seen me since my marriage!"

"Oh, you'll keep, Lyd. I know your little mug well enough . . . Well, and this is your idea of furnishing? You're on the æsthetic lay, I see. Majolica, old ivories, enamels, Pallisser——"

"Palissy, please."

"Oh, call it what you like ! But you know, Lyd,

there is no money now in this old mediæval rubbish. As a sensible woman, who has been brought up to know the meaning of 'cash down,' you ought to know better than to lumber up your house with things that are going down in the market."

"You must remember," she said pedantically, "all these old things have their artistic interest and value in an artist's eyes."

"Ah, but will these artists of yours back their opinion with their money? Not they! Can they go and bid for a picture or a bronze against a Manchester mill-owner or a Liverpool cotton-broker? Devil a bit!"

"Oh, Fred, hush! these are awful things to say in an artist's house—though I must say I do think——"

"That money's the only real test? You wouldn't be your father's daughter, Lyd, if you didn't. Poor old pater! Now, look at this old bit of majolica with the crack across it, and the Madonna out of all possible drawing——"

"Heavens, Fred! Gubbio ruby lustre ware of the best period, and signed by the master! What would Ferdinand say?"

"I don't care what Ferdinand would say; I know what old Cohen would say, or Matthew Levi, or Jack Roberts, all fellows rolling in money.

They'd say it wasn't a convertible asset—that you couldn't get a five-pound note on it if you walked up and down Bond Street with it in your hand."

"Not a negotiable security, eh?" said she, laughing.

"Just so, Lyd—so take my advice and buy things that *are*—modern things, you know! Paris bronzes, and pictures by rising men, or good half-modern things, Sèvres and Dresden——"

"I see—what Ferdinand calls pretty crockery!"

"Take my word for it, Sèvres and Dresden are rising stock. You just invest in it, Lyd, if you have a chance and can back your own judgment. I declare I could teach your husband a thing or two. The fact is we go one better in art, down Manchester way, than you do here in London."

"Do you, now? If there is a thing Ferdinand knows about, it's about china and furniture, and old masters——"

"There, there, old girl, don't get your feathers up! I declare it's quite pretty to see it defending its little new husband's taste! . . . Let's drop all this rot. I'm sure it's nothing to me if you like to live in an old curiosity shop . . . I've lots of messages for you from them at home. By the way, aren't you neglecting them rather? That's not good biz: mother seems kind of mopey since

father's death, and Lucy says you're a very bad sister."

"I'm cross with Lucy. She's so obstinate."

"Oh, about Woffle! Well, I'll tell you—Lucy doesn't take any stock in Woffle—he's too rational for her. It's my opinion she's dying to make a fool of herself, same as you've done."

"Well, Fred dear, you never had *much* manners, but since you've been to Manchester—"

"Let my manners alone," said he good-humouredly. "I believe Lucy's got a writer chap in her eye—"

"Who, I wonder?"

"That man *you* had a try for—what's his name? —St. Jerome."

"Oh, William St. Jerome! I considered him, that's all. He didn't do. He makes a very good friend, and would have made a very bad husband. I like him better as he is."

"But how about Lucy?"

"He'll never propose to Lucy. You must disabuse her of him. He is one of the men who will never marry for my sake."

"Did he propose, then?" said Fred, looking arch. "I always understood that you never had any offers at all before Ferdinand proposed to you."

"I never," said his sister, with dignity, "allowed any man to actually propose to me. I always stopped them before they came to the point."

"Very clever of you, dear. Some girls can't . . . Yes, you're a clever woman, Lydia. I can always talk to you. I came to talk to you to-day. By the way, let me tell you something to your disadvantage—if you don't come to see Aunt Elspeth oftener she will be cutting you out of her will, and then, where will you be?"

"I suppose I must go oftener," said Lydia. "But her room is so stuffy, and, for the sake of a few beggarly thousands, which I suppose is all it amounts to——"

"There's no knowing! The old woman's very secretive . . . ! Say, Lydia, who bosses this show—the money, I mean?"

"I do—more or less."

"Rather more than less, I fancy, if I know my sweet little sister at all. Well, listen; if you really have a free hand, I can put you up to something good."

"Can you, Fred dear? Well, go ahead!"

"Well, it's like this——"

"Oh, Fred, don't say *it's like this*—only the most awful people say that—models and Bohemians——"

"All serene! I see you don't want any help from me. Good-bye! Here, where's my hat and stick?"

"Don't be a cross idiot, Fred, but tell me about this good thing, do."

"I couldn't think of instructing such a superior young woman!"

"You know, Fred, you always had the best head for figures in the family."

"Rot!"

"And you really know a lot about art."

"Footle!"

"Well, about Sèvres and Dresden you do."

"I say, Lyd, did I ever tell you about that old Sèvres bowl I gave a cool thou. for?"

"Oh, Fred dear, how rash!"

"But I sold it for twelve-fifty next day to old Mat Levi of Manchester 'Change. That was good enough, wasn't it?"

"What, to a Jew, too? Well, you *are* clever! Now tell me about this good thing."

"Well, you see . . . it's a sort of syndicate we're in."

"Who's in?"

"I am, for one. I went five thou. with five other Manchester chaps. Cohen has signed for thirty thousand, Philipps for five, Sam Mendoza for ten, Jack Roberts, Lewis, and Matthew Levi make up the balance, or nearly the balance."

"What's the whole figure?"

"By Jove, Lyd, you're as keen as a penknife! Well, the whole tots up to just a hundred thousand."

"Warm men?"

"Every one of 'em. Cohen's a millionaire, owns fifty thousand tons of shipping, two cotton-mills, and ten acres of Liverpool docks. Mendoza is a strongish man, and the balance have cut their eye-teeth, you bet."

Her eyes sparkled. "Really, Fred! Go on. Tell me more. Any London men in your little lot?"

"Not good enough; we keep our good things to ourselves. Besides, you London people are too slow and slack for us—we Manchester fellows are just Yankees with a fresh edge on."

"And this is a gilt-edged thing, is it?"

"Gilt-edged! Why, Lyd, you seem to have picked up a trifle of shop talk yourself."

"From you, dear Fred, but I hate it. So this really is a good thing, is it?"

"You'll be on velvet."

"I shall, shall I? How do you make that out?"

"Well, if you come in, you will."

"Oh, so you want me to come in, do you?"

"Oh 'no,' I don't; you may stand out in

the cold if you like and see us pile up the stamps."

"Well, let's hear more about it. What are you syndicating about?—though it doesn't much matter, does it?"

"Of course it doesn't, as we shan't stay in a moment after the scrip is taken up—oh, well, you won't understand—after the public come in at the premium we want."

"It's a company then?"

"Of course. The syndicate is to buy a concession. Then we start a company. See?"

"Mines?"

"Yes."

"Silver?"

"No—we're not idiots—gold, of course. No other metal goes down at present. The richest reef in West Australia—the first prospectors built their oven up with gold-bearing quartz, and swore fearfully when the fire got hot and the gold ran out and spoilt their damper—the most picturesque lie in all the diggings——"

"When is the company to be formed?"

"The day after to-morrow, and we can let you have ten thousand before twelve to-morrow. After that it will be too late."

"If it's such a good thing, why don't you keep it to yourself?"

"Well, you see, contango rates were too stiff for me this turn. I can't run to more than five thousand."

"I wish you'd explain it all a little more. It's rather a leap in the dark, isn't it?"

"Well, you must take it or leave it! It is a real good thing, I tell you, and if I can't keep it all myself I want it to be in the family. You'll have fully paid-up shares allotted to you, and you'll be able to unload at a premium in a month or so."

"I suppose I ought to ask my husband first."

"Oh yes, do, if you like. But what can a crank of an artist know of business?"

"Manchester manners again!"

"Oh, rot! Business is business, and I'm not going to pick my words for you. Well, tell him if you like, but I should advise you not to tell him too much. Just get him to say 'Yes' somehow, and you won't regret it, Lyd. By Jove, if he were to have the cheek to want to control you in the management of your own money!—it's what he married you for, I suppose?"

"Well, and if he married me for my money, I married him for his position, and all that," she cried angrily. Then, softening down, "You must never say that, Fred, or think it . . . If you like, you may look upon our marriage as a purely business arrangement—money on my side, posi-

tion on his. I was sick of Bedford Square and everything in it. My life there was hateful to me. It didn't suit me at all. I was born for something different. I had everything I wanted, except what Ferdinand could give me—the life I lead now, the people I know, the society I like, and the prestige of his reputation. You have no idea how highly he is thought of——”

“Listen to her ‘booming’ her own husband!” sneered Fred.

“I want to make you see I have got what I bargained for!”

“Ah, and has he?” said Fred meaningly.

“What do you mean by that, now?”

“Well, in such a marriage as you say yours is, I’m blest if I see where the love comes in!”

“You needn’t see,” she said dryly. “Look here, don’t let’s argue any more about things you don’t understand. Explain to me what you want.”

“Good Lord! it isn’t what *I* want! It’s for you—for your advantage,” he exclaimed.

“Very well, write those figures you told me on a bit of paper——”

“For you to show to your husband?”

“I’ll think about that. Isn’t there a prospectus or something? Hand it over. I’ll let you know by the first post to-morrow . . . I say,” looking at the clock, “we dine at eight. Good-bye,

old boy, look me up again soon. Here—this way ! Give my love to mother. Here's your stick—good-bye."

"You'll thank me some day for having made your fortune," he cried, as she literally put him out of the house.

SCENE XI

SCENE.—MRS. MUNDAY'S room. *Her maid CÉLESTE is sitting up with a novel, yawning.* MRS. MUNDAY enters, flinging off her cloak with a gesture of relief.

MRS. MUNDAY. You can go to bed, Céleste. I don't want you. Good-night! . . . Silly girl, couldn't you wait to rub your eyes till you are out of the room? (*Sitting down in front of the glass and looking at herself intently.*) I am sure nobody would think I had been out to dinner every night for the last fortnight! And I was a success to-night—as usual! I wouldn't care to go out unless I was. A woman may just as well give up the game when once she sees she can't make the other women jealous any longer. Madame Recamier said that, I believe. Well, I needn't give it up at present, so far as I can see . . . Yet, I am not a beautiful woman—hardly a pretty woman—almost a plain one sometimes. But what of that—no one knows it but

me. I manage so well. I have had my portrait in four society papers as a beauty since I married. That's pretty good for a plain woman! . . . I have a really good complexion—no wonder—I never eat sweets or anything nice! I sacrifice all that! But it is quite worth while. I don't need to wear powder like the other poor wretches, who go to parties with puffs in their pockets. How I despise them! . . . My nose *is* rather insignificant, but it is far less hampering than an admittedly fine nose like May Bowen's, that you can't escape from. Now my nice ordinary nose does not commit me to any particular style of *coiffure* . . . My mouth—well, as I am always talking, nobody knows what it is like when it's shut. I haven't much colour—all the better!—I can wear any shade I like . . . Nevill France is a beauty—oh, I don't deny it!—but she does not make her effect—except among artists. She has to be put in a picture before she looks right, somehow . . . No, I wouldn't change myself if I could. There's something better than beauty, and that is charm. I may not be beautiful—no, I suppose I'm not—but I am something better—I am fascinating!

MUNDAY (*entering behind her*). Who is fascinating? You? Yes, you are.

MRS. MUNDAY (*rather angrily*). I do wish you wouldn't come creeping into the room like that!

You walk like one of your own cats . . . No, I didn't mean me!

MUNDAY. Who, then? Me?

MRS. MUNDAY. I was merely remarking, dear, that good-looking as you were, you were singularly lacking in fascination.

MUNDAY. I leave that to you. Mine are the every-day looks that cheer and not inebriate . . . You looked awfully pretty to-night!

MRS. MUNDAY. Ah, but my good looks were quite thrown away. Did you ever know such dull people? Friends of yours; I am not responsible for them. We must drop them, quietly—they're impossible! And they always give me the stupidest man of the lot to go in to dinner with, because they know I don't choose to lose my reputation for being good company. I am supposed to be able to make a broom-stick talk, as Swift said.

MUNDAY. Ah, did he? Really, Lydia, for a clever woman, you get hold of the wrong ends of sticks oftener than any one I know. It's a broom-stick this time.

MRS. MUNDAY. Really, Ferdinand, you artists are too awfully ignorant of English literature—allusions to it are quite lost upon you! Don't you know that Dean Swift—

MUNDAY (*hastily*). I apologize. You are right, of course. But let us be civil to the Seymours, if

you don't mind. They are the oldest friends I have. Lady Seymour is a very good soul.

MRS. MUNDAY (*wearily*). Oh yes, she's quite a good woman. She wears the same bonnet for two seasons. Virtue unadorned bores me. A frump is the witch of these days, and should not be suffered to live.

MUNDAY. Dear Lydia, everybody isn't like you! And you want a sort of dull background for your brilliancy.

MRS. MUNDAY. Dear Ferdinand, sometimes you put things really well. You have a great gift of expression . . . Sit down there, while I tell you something. I don't often consult you, but you are so sweet to-night, I must . . . Listen! . . . (*She sits on the arm of his chair.*) Fred was here this afternoon——

MUNDAY. I know. I smelt his kind of cigar. Its not too subtle aroma rose to the studio and mingled with my finer fancies. Nevill——

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, was Nevill there? She's so quiet, I never know when she is there or not. . . . Yes, Fred smoked all the time—he can always talk better when he is smoking—and he really had something important to tell me . . . Lean forward a minute, your shoulder is hurting my wrist! Well, Fred wants——

MUNDAY. What does Fred want? Me to

paint his portrait? I'll do it for love, to please you. Can I say more?

MRS. MUNDAY. Do you suppose that boy could sit still for half-an-hour? He is simply bursting with energy. Besides, he would never go to an idealist like you for his portrait. He would want to go to a strong painter, with lots of "devil"—

MUNDAY. And shadows as black as my hat, and a background that knocks you out of time. Well, I can survive the affront. What does Fred want? Business?

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, it's business. Very good business!

MUNDAY. Ah, that means he wants to "unload."

MRS. MUNDAY (*a pause*). Why, Ferdinand—

MUNDAY (*laughing*). You didn't think I knew so much about it?

MRS. MUNDAY. I wonder if you know what "unload" means?

MUNDAY. Not in the least. Tell me, why does Fred want to unload?

MRS. MUNDAY. But he doesn't; he doesn't! It was you who said he did.

MUNDAY. How stupid of me! Tell me about this good thing of his.

MRS. MUNDAY (*after a moment's hesitation*). I

know, Ferdinand, you are very ignorant about City matters, but even *you* must know what a syndicate is.

MUNDAY. Even I ! It's a lot of fellows putting their money together to do some one else out of his, isn't it ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, if you are going to waste your time and mine in making epigrams——

MUNDAY. Well, what is a syndicate if it isn't that ?

MRS. MUNDAY. It is a pool subscribed to by a number of financiers who trust each other, to carry out some great financial operation.

MUNDAY. I see, and Fred wants us to be one of these financiers who trust each other ! Why, I wouldn't trust one of them with a single spoon !

MRS. MUNDAY. That shows, dear Ferdinand, that you're little better than one yourself.

MUNDAY (*laughing*). Good, but I thought we weren't to waste our time making epigrams.

MRS. MUNDAY. That was not an epigram : it was a holy truth. And really, Ferdinand, if one can't trust one's own brother, who can one trust ? Fred's a great rough clumsy creature, but, at any rate, he's honest. It's the virtue of his defects. And he's got an extraordinary good head for

finance ; his things are bound to go. Besides, it isn't your money he wants ; it's mine.

MUNDAY. I thought yours was mine and mine yours ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Dear, old-fashioned thing ! Yours is mine, of course, and mine is my own, by the terms of my father's will.

MUNDAY (*drily*). I see. Do you carry a copy of it in your pocket ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't be cross, dear, but do try to understand . . . I don't want to *spend* any money, I only mean to transfer some of what is standing in my name—in Indian Fours, you know—into shares in this syndicate, and I was going to explain it all to you, but you get so cross !

MUNDAY. It needs no explanation to tell me that——

MRS. MUNDAY. Then I shan't explain, but just do it.

MUNDAY. I refuse——

MRS. MUNDAY (*softly*). Dear, you have no right to refuse.

MUNDAY (*hotly*). We'll see about that ! I'm not going to let you play ducks and drakes with——

MRS. MUNDAY. I know about these things, and you don't, apparently. This is simply foolish

obstinacy and tyranny on your part. I must do as I think best . . . I wish I hadn't told you.

MUNDAY. You couldn't have gone into such a thing without telling me, and I won't be a party to—

MRS. MUNDAY. Look here, Ferdinand, is it my money or is it yours? When I married you, you were—

MUNDAY (*rising and going to the other end of the room*). A pauper, a pauper with prospects, and you were an heiress! I am sorry you make me remember it. I did not marry you for that, I married you for yourself—because I—hang it all! . . . I said to myself, I won't live on my wife—I won't have it said that I married her for her money. I'll work as if she were penniless and I had to keep her—and I have! I've worked like a dog and done things I hated—painted portraits, hurried things—I've very nearly not been an artist for your sake, and now you reproach me! Damn it all! Take this money of yours and throw it out of the window, into the sea if you like, only never, while you live, say a word about it to me again.

MRS. MUNDAY (*pale*). Don't be cross, dear.

MUNDAY. Cross!

MRS. MUNDAY. In a rage then! I am glad

we understand each other. (*Slowly.*) You don't object, then, to my employing my own money in what I think a judicious enterprise?

MUNDAY (*hotly*). Not in the least! Employ it, spend it, go into your syndicate, trust your financiers, confide in Fred, anything you please, only never mention it to me again—and when you're beggared, come to me and we'll live on what I can make.

MRS. MUNDAY (*kissing him*). No chance of that, dear! (*rising lightly from the arm of the chair*). Oh, and, Ferdinand, I wanted to ask you if—

MUNDAY. Please don't ask me for my advice on any subject whatever. Good-night. (*Going*.)

MRS. MUNDAY. I wasn't going to ask you for your advice. I was going to advise *you* about something that really ought to be settled quickly.

MUNDAY. What?

MRS. MUNDAY. That replica—

MUNDAY. What replica? I don't know what you are talking about. I told you I didn't paint replicas. I'm very tired—let me go!

MRS. MUNDAY. *You* called it a replica, I didn't. I mean the "Lamia" for Mr. Verschoyle—he wanted you to do another for him. I told you about it this morning.

MUNDAY (*icily*). If you please, Lydia, I am leaving you the entire control of what you consider

your own affairs, will you kindly permit me to manage what are certainly my own? I am, I believe, competent. Good-night. [Exit.]

MRS. MUNDAY (*pensively*). He seems cross! He almost banged the door . . . I wish I hadn't told him. Of course he got it all wrong. (*Beginning to undo her hair*.) This is the first time he ever left me like that! . . . Well, I suppose it is a quarrel . . . the first quarrel! . . . Oh, rubbish! . . . I suppose he doesn't expect me to make a scene and have hysterics out loud till he comes back to forgive me, or go and hammer at his door until he opens it? I shall just go to bed quietly. Silly old Ferdinand! He will be all right to-morrow. (*Winding up her watch*.) One o'clock! . . . Good heavens! I was forgetting I promised to let Fred know by the first post to-morrow morning. How lucky I thought of it! (*Sitting down to her escritoire*.) "Dear Fred, go ahead!—I'm on. Cheque follows. Lydia." There! Short and sweet! . . . I wasn't going to miss a good thing like that! Not I! Ferdinand's a dear, but I'd back Fred against him in a matter of business any day! I've studied his old prospectus, and the thing seems all square. It promises a tremendous lot. I dare say half is true . . . Now I must slip out and post this. I hope Ferdinand's asleep. He mustn't hear me go out or he'll offer

to post it for me—such is his politeness! That would be playing it rather low down on him, when he hates the idea so! (*Puts on a cloak and a lace scarf over her head.*) I look just as if I were going to elope in this get-up! I never shall, though. *Pas si bête!*

SCENE XII

THE setting sun shone into Ferdinand Munday's studio in long slant yellow rays. Three different clocks chimed one after another, not discordantly. The artist dropped his sheaf of brushes into a deep vase with a clash and drew a long breath. "There, that will do for to-day!" he said.

The Persian cat, the tabby cat, and the black cat sat up and blinked. Munday's model came down from her *estrade*, put on her hat, and began to arrange her veil in front of a dusky old Italian mirror that hung near the door.

"Shall I help you?" he asked. "That's not much of a glass."

"You couldn't!" she replied, with feminine contempt, adroitly disposing of coils of net under her chin and over her face, while the artist turned on his sliding chair and watched her.

"A very good pose!" said he.

Nevill let her hands drop to her sides. "I am not posing," she said, "I am only putting my veil on."

"Why should you be vexed because I say your attitudes are good? I ought to know."

"I am not vexed. I am glad. All the better for the stage."

"You are still thinking of that?" he asked absently.

"Of course I do. I always do. I think of nothing else—poor stage-struck fool that I am! It is before me always, like a *mirage*—and just as deceptive, very likely. Lydia always discourages me."

"She doesn't know what you can do. No more do I. You have never condescended to recite to us."

"Because I am shy," said Nevill brusquely.

"Shy! An actress!"

"Oh, not of professionals! The other day Marischal made me recite to him on the stage of 'The Piccadilly'—all by myself—in that odd daylight kind of dusk, you know—all the stalls covered with sheeting, like ghosts of an audience—a very cold unsympathetic audience, but perhaps not colder than the real ones sometimes!—and he went round and sat in the front of the house to see if I could speak loud enough."

"And could you?"

"Yes. I forgot all about him, and everybody. I let myself go."

"What did Marischal say?"

"He said the usual thing—that I must wait—profession overstocked—would take me on in a moment if—"

"If there wasn't a Mrs. Marischal?"

"I suppose so," she said wearily. "It is all very far off and hopeless. One *may* have everything, I see, even talent, but if one hasn't interest—! Oh, I must go. I have four thousand words to type and send off by the last post."

"And who posts them for you?" he asked suddenly.

"I post them myself. The pillar-box is not more than a hundred yards away. You should see me run by like a flash, just about midnight, and the policeman at the corner turn his bull's-eye on me."

"Oh, there is a policeman!" he said, relieved.

"I should think there was—in a neighbourhood like ours! Why, there is a drunken row every night almost, and some one turned out of the public-house next door. Last night Mrs. Lennox, at number ten, talked—or swore—all night. The place is so badly built that it sounds as if the voices were in the same room with one. Mrs. Mulligan is always half throwing herself out of the window, and being fished back again. Then the night before, Mrs. Grote—that's the watch-

maker's wife under me—had gone to sleep, and wouldn't wake to unlock the door for her husband, and he nearly battered a panel in. It is impossible to sleep after six, for everybody gets up so early. 'Oh, it's lively up our way,' as the song says. Now I am going!" She put away the brindled cat, which she was holding in her arms, and held out her hand.

"I am going to walk home with you."

"No."

"Why No?"

"Yes—then."

He took a last look at the picture on the easel, and then covered it with a bit of drapery. Her eyes followed him wistfully, but she said nothing.

"You are very good," said Munday, "not to tease me to let you see yourself—most women would!"

"I know you would hate it."

"Yes, you understand—you are an artist yourself. You know that, to an artist, an unfinished work, once shown, is of no more value. The bloom is off—one hates the sight of it—it is like pulling up a thing by the roots to see if it is growing. It never grows—that's all!"

Nevill knew what was in his mind. The day before, Mrs. Munday, accompanied by three fashionable friends, had made an inroad on the studio in

his absence, and had given them the opportunity of an early view of some of the "pictures of the year." They had left unmistakable traces of their presence. Women never have patience to put things back exactly as they find them.

Munday and Nevill went down the broad oak staircase together. The walls were hung in places with good old tapestry, and studded with the dull gold of Cinquecento frames and mirrors. There were rare engravings, of the German and Dutch masters, and modern etchings adorned with the autograph signatures of famous foreign artists—"À mon ami Ferdinand Munday." Odds and ends of statuary—bronzes—all of a certain value, stood about. Munday was a collector in his way. The whole effect was rich and sombre.

"I suppose this is what you call a show house?" said Nevill, a little scornfully.

"Oh yes, it's quite the correct thing in artists' houses, I believe."

"And are you what is called a society artist?"

"Not yet—but my wife is trying hard to make me one."

"Don't let her!"

"It is impossible to do both," said Munday bitterly. "Society first ruins art, and then patronizes it, and it takes a red-brick house to make imaginative pictures go down. Come along!"

"When I think of *my* staircase, that I pay six-pence a week for sweeping down and lighting! It has stone steps, and tile-brick walls, and its only decorations are cans of milk and empty coal-scuttles. It is as hard as the world. What are you looking at?"

"I am looking to see where we are dining to-night. My wife generally writes it down on this slate for me."

"Do you dine out every night?"

"Very nearly."

"Do you like it?"

"Like it? . . . Oh, well, I like it when once I'm there! But it is not good for one's art; the hot rooms hurt one's eyes, and it is very hard to get up in the morning."

"Then why do you do it?" she said impatiently.

"Why do I get up? Because I have to work."

"Go out so much, I mean, if you don't care for it?"

"My wife does."

"Then let *her* go out if she likes it."

"My dear little Bohemian, don't you know that husband and wife are supposed to dine out together? It's about the one thing they do do together in this odd society world."

"Artists should not go into society at all!" said she dogmatically. "It is demoralizing."

"I don't agree with you there. Because a man is an artist, there's no need for him to be a bear."

The door closed behind them, and they went out into the street. Nevill seemed inclined to continue the subject. "Society is so unreal," she said.

"Don't be so conventional!" She stared, he laughed. "Bohemia has its conventions too, and that assumption is one of them. But I assure you, you'll find as much human nature in a ball-room as on a sanded floor, and a good deal more complexity."

"I dare say," said she; "but still, it's all too artificial for me. I am not good at posing and finessing, and diplomatising, and hiding my feelings, and getting my own way without seeming to, and defying Mrs. Grundy while I appear to bow to her. Lydia is so good at it. She picks her way about among conventions as if they were eggs, without breaking any of them."

"The art is soon learnt," said Munday; "women are so clever."

"I am not clever then. I often feel as if I were two different persons, in two different worlds—my own rough-and-ready knockabout world, and your soft gentle one, where I have to pretend to be delicate and helpless, and useless. It is such a change. I leave this dreary slum of mine to come

to you ; I go to parties with you and Lydia, and it's all gay, and flippant, and electric-lighted—and then, like Cinderella, I hear the clock strike, and I get into my pumpkin—the omnibus—and I come back here and stumble up the dark stairs, and fumble with my latch-key, and let myself in, and there is no fire, no light, no nothing, nobody to say good-night to . . ." Her voice fell.

"It sounds very lonely."

"And in the morning I get up, and there is nobody to say good-morning to, and I light the fire, and I boil a kettle and make some tea, and drink it at the corner of the kitchen table, and eat a slice of stale bread and forget to butter it—"

"Is that all your breakfast ?"

"It isn't worth while to cook elaborate things for oneself."

"Now I see why professional independent women are always so thin ! Why don't you get a friend to come and live with you ?"

"Chum up with a girl, you mean ?" said Nevill, in the soft, penetrating, suasive tones that seemed to neutralize and even dignify her slang and her directness. "I should quarrel with her in a week. I hate women."

"Then I see nothing for it but——"

"But what ?"

"A husband."

"Oh, how tiresome of you to say that! Just like the others."

"Who are the others?—my wife?"

"Yes. Lydia thinks, you know, that a woman's life is an utter failure if she isn't married. Because she's happy herself is no reason . . . I wish—I *wish* she would leave me alone about Mr. Verschoyle."

"I suppose I ought to speak for poor Verschoyle," said Munday. "He is my friend—but——"

"But he is so dull, and good, and commonplace! Dear Mr. Munday, you can't conscientiously recommend him to a wild woman like me, now can you?"

"You would at any rate have some one to say good-night and good-morning to."

"I might have a parrot, if that's all."

"You would find a parrot even more troublesome than a husband. It always pecks, and wants its head stroked occasionally."

"I never mean to have either," said Nevill decidedly. "I have argued it out with Lydia scores of times. I am already twenty-four; I am used to living alone, and having my own way. It's not much of a way, but I've always had it. Besides, I am not nice enough. I'm far too much of a

Bohemian to marry any one in your world, and I could not marry any one in my own!"

"Why not?"

"I like men to be gentlemen."

"Well, there is your editor! Is he not charming?"

"I hope you don't believe I would have the bad form to flirt with my editor! He looks upon me as a machine, I am happy to say—nothing more."

"But there are nice men in the world who don't by any means regard you as a machine, and who would marry you to-morrow, if you were to so much as droop your little eyelid in their direction. I know it. They come and confide in me—as a sort of guardian and well-wisher of yours. Yes, I see it all. You will choose one of them, and go away, and be a great lady, and be too proud to sit for me any more. I shall grin and bear it, and give you your own portrait as a wedding present."

"I shall always be ready to sit for you whenever you want me," she said earnestly. "Always. You will have only to call me and I'll come, whatever I am doing—wherever I am—out of my grave even."

"I don't think I am equal to painting a ghost," he replied lightly. "I had rather you came, in flesh and blood, from your husband's house, happy and gay, and with a little half-hour to spare to an old friend . . . I only want you to be happy, you know."

"Happy in marriage, do you mean?"

"Women are happier married, I suppose."

"Are they? I am not sure! Anyhow, we can't *all* marry. That's just it," she said vehemently. "There are not husbands enough to go round—statistics prove it. Then why can't a certain number of women be allowed to stand out, and not be despised, because they have chosen that line, and mean to abide by it?"

"All that was possible, in fact," said Munday. "Yes, I see it coming! . . . A new order of Vestals, bound under penalty of social death never to bind themselves in marriage. Free lances! What a good time they would have, to be sure!"

"How do you mean?"

He laughed. "They would have entered into no obligation not to flirt!"

"You will insist on treating it all as a joke, but I don't see why there should not be some association of the sort. Professional women, who have their work, who don't want to incur obligations, to make bonds——"

"I know! I know! All this anti-hymeneal fervour," said Munday, "would go down, like the Arab tents, in a single night, the moment you happened to fall in love."

"Marriage is sometimes the grave of love!"

"It has been said."

"Oh, I dare say it is a commonplace ; but I mean that, to me, love bound by a promise is no longer love, but a bargain—entered into quite honestly, by two honest people—but still, a bargain. To promise to be true. How can any one ? True in deed, one can be, I suppose ; but in thought, impossible ! Thought is free. To cease to wish to be constant, is to be inconstant."

"All lovers' promises are, of course, entirely founded on the doctrine of probabilities," said Munday. "A. cannot promise to love B. for ever, it is true ; but he has calculated the chances, and he thinks that, all things considered, it is more likely that he should do so than the reverse. And then he promises !"

"On the off chance ! How dreadful ! If I had once given my word, at the altar or the registry office, I should keep it—a promise is a promise. But I will never give it. I should be afraid."

"You say that, but, all the same, if you ever really cared for any one, you would not find the prospect of eternal fidelity impossible."

She answered passionately. "Oh, if I really ever cared for any man, I dare say I should be glad to make a fool of myself every way I could, like other women. I could affront even the horrors of domesticity for his sake—or any other horror . . . Oh yes, between two real lovers the mere marriage

bond would be a trifle, a harmless necessary detail—like ordering a visiting card, or paying a call—a concession to society, a formality to be entered into, or neglected, if need were . . . Am I talking great nonsense ? ” she asked suddenly.

“ It is a great deal pleasanter to listen to than cheap cynicism, and snappish epigrams that dry up talk. Do go on. If all the advanced women advocated their theories in such a soft voice——”

“ I am not an advanced woman.”

“ Oh no, you are not. You deny it so indignantly ! I knew you did not mean half you said.”

“ Did I say anything so very dreadful ? ”

“ You fringed the improper now and then, but it doesn’t matter—with me. I am a safe person to talk to. I live in the sixteenth century, my critics say. Still, I wouldn’t talk so rashly to every one, if I were you.”

“ But in *my* dreadful world everybody says everything,” cried the girl desperately. “ Everything is discussed, everything under heaven and on earth——”

“ Yes, I know it. You say almost everything, and mean hardly anything at all—Bohemian fire and fury, signifying nothing. I think you have got rather tired of it all, haven’t you ? ”

“ Yes, very. Since I have known you—you and Lydia.”

"I wonder——" he began, as they came to the iron gate before the cavernous stairs of Talgarth Mansions, where a dozen grimy children were clambering and playing—and stopped.

"What?"

"If you see much of them? Do they call on you here?"

"My Bohemian friends? Oh no. I don't invite them. I invite nobody . . . I invite you," she said, turning suddenly, and holding out her hand as if to lead him in. "Come up for once, and let me give you some tea. You never have. You have never seen my rooms. I'm afraid Lydia has given you a very unfavourable idea of them. They are not smart, but they are really rather pretty; but I put the Botticelli angel you gave me over the mantel-piece, to bless me! Do, do, do come up!" She pleaded like a child. The line of her upturned chin was exquisite.

"No . . . I won't come up, I think . . . thank you!" said Munday, with a sort of polite brusqueness. "There isn't time. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, then!" said she, a little hurt, and darted into the cavernous depths. He stood for a moment and watched the white dress fluttering up the grey stone staircase, then turned away with a sigh, and set his face westwards.

SCENE XIII

"I'M tired, Cossie," said Mrs. Munday. "You had better dance with Lucy! . . . What is that, Mr. St. Jerome? You have something to say to me? Come and say it then." She indicated a seat beside her.

The pretty Mrs. Munday was looking unusually pretty in her ball dress of white and silver, and as cool as a lily in the hot glare of a midsummer-eve ball-room. Other women looked like flushed bacchantes beside her ; her frills never looked tumbled, her flounces never got torn, and her eyes, if they never sparkled, never looked jaded. She did not dance well, perhaps that is why she danced so seldom, but was generally to be found sitting complacently under the strongest light in the room, whose illumination she confidently invited, in the midst of a little court of admirers, rejoicing their *blasé* souls with apt epigrams and mordant sayings and amusing *on-dits*, for which she was the last person to hold herself responsible. She spared no one, least of all her friends.

"I hear that you said a very unkind and untrue thing of me the other day?" I remarked, proceeding to repeat the piece of malice in question.

"Did I? I suppose I did. I can't think what made me. Wasn't it true?" she replied, undaunted, looking up at me candidly and laughing.

I got no change out of her, as the phrase is. It was always the way. Presently I strolled away and came across the couple whom Mrs. Munday had precipitated into each other's unwilling arms a few seconds ago.

"I was trying to persuade your sister—" Davenant was beginning.

"Which sister?" panted Lucy. Bedford Square is apt to pant. "I've got two."

"I mean Mrs. Munday, of course."

"I don't see why, 'of course'! You might have meant Toosie, she's much nearer your age."

"Let us dance," he said wearily. Lucy was trying to be clever, and succeeding merely in being pert, as usual. Presently they stopped near me again. I caught the phrase—"dances like an angel."

"I don't think married women have any business to dance at all," was the curt rejoinder. "Dances aren't intended for them."

"But it must be so delightful to have a married sister to take you out. You and Mrs. Munday must be always together?"

"Not more than we can h——than we want to be," amended Lucy. "Let us dance!" It was Lucy who said it this time. They disappeared into the swirl, and I discovered Mrs. Hugo Malory and took her to supper. Mrs. Malory, who is by way of being a social arbitress, had extended the privilege of her acquaintance to Mrs. Munday, who knew the value of it, and took care to present that side of her character which was most likely to appeal to that important lady. "One must keep in with Mrs. Malory," she would say to me in her more candid moments. "It is good business."

"The pretty Mrs. Munday! Ah, I knew her before she was married—long before, in fact," remarked the social arbitress, as Lydia passed us, on the arm of the most important man in the room. Mrs. Malory always said what she liked, and did not entirely, it will be seen, take Lydia at her own valuation, or accept her little pose without modification. "She came and told me all about it. Her people are immensely respectable, but dull, and she was dying to get out of their set, don't you know. She had aspirations."

I knew all this, but it was amusing to hear it stated in a different way. I merely remarked: "How times are changed, when a rich banker's daughter marries an artist for position!"

"I know—but so it is! Ferdinand Munday was

quite a *parti* for her, poor, but well-connected, and in a good set . . . I forget where he met the little Barker. I came across her at a cookery class. One makes odd acquaintances at those places ! She amused me ; she was such a dear little *bourgeoise*. I asked her to come and see me, and she came very late, and hot, and out of breath, and said she couldn't find her way to Hill Street ! Imagine ! ”

“ Not to know Hill Street argues oneself unknown ! ”

“ I shouldn't mention it, except to show you how wonderfully she has got on ! ”

“ She knows her way to Hill Street now, or any other street,” said I.

“ Oh yes, she has managed to make herself the fashion. But I happen to know that a great many people only tolerate her for her husband's sake. He is quite one of us—rather in the clouds, you know—but I like him. He is not a bit like the average artist—very good company—he never bores one with ‘shop’ talk. But I believe he works very hard. One has to ask him to dinner if one wants to see him.”

“ Do you know Mrs. Munday's sister ? ” I asked.

“ The one called Lucy ? Vaguely ! A pale replica of Lydia with the ‘devil’ left out ! Almost bad form—and there is a brother, I believe, who is

worse than anything you can imagine! Lydia's quite the best of them," she concluded, "but she had better take care. I can tell her what will happen if she goes on flirting with that ridiculous boy of the Fulhams."

"What will happen?"

"People will cut her, that's all!"

"For flirting?"

"For flirting—no; for flirting with Cossie Davenant—yes."

"He seems an innocent youth enough."

"Hopelessly corrupt! You may believe me. I know. Turn round, Mr. St. Jerome," she said sharply; "the replica seems to be making signs to attract your attention."

It was Miss Lucy Barker, partnerless, who, with a pretty boldness, was touching me on the elbow with her fan. Though I was technically supposed to be "Lydia's," all her family treated me with a charming familiarity.

"Come and talk to me, Mr. St. Jerome. I always rely on you when I haven't a partner."

"You may," I responded.

"Yes, because you don't dance. Oh dear, I *am* so tired!" She threw herself back on the ottoman. "Wasn't it too bad of Lydia to throw me at the head of that little worm, who didn't even want me?"

"Has a worm a curly head and a pretty pink face like that?"

"Oh, very pretty, and curly, and white and soft, and everything that a girl's ought to be. Why, he's got a better complexion than me! Now, please don't say, 'All the better for him!'"

"Why should I?"

"It seemed obvious." A long course of intimacy with Lydia had given her family a keen scent for the obvious taunt, to be forestalled if possible. Lucy had all the bitterness and shrewdness of an oppressed race, combined with a blunt force of expression that always entertained me.

"I can't stand that boy," she went on, "and Lydia makes such a donkey of herself about him. He goes everywhere with her. He is devoted to her. Isn't it extraordinary?"

"She is very handsome," I said.

"Ah, you men are all alike. I don't think it's fair, I really don't. Lydia takes everybody."

"But surely *you* wouldn't look at Cossie Davenant?"

"No, of course not, but——" she laughed cynically, "I believe the original intention was that he should take to me. At least Lydia said so . . . She is always asking what she calls 'a young man for Lucy' to her dinners, and then it always ends in his being one for her. I'm sure I

thought it was the married woman's part to play gooseberry."

"Yes. That was so once—in the good old days !
Nous avons changé tout cela."

"She always makes me drive her home first when we go out together," continued Lucy, in an injured tone. "She is so afraid of the horse coming down, and her having to get out alone in the street."

"But supposing the same thing happened to you after you had left her ?"

"I am not so showy as Lydia," said Lucy simply. "She says so herself. Ferdinand is coming to fetch her to-night, from a man's dinner—with speeches. He can't possibly be here yet ! I wish he were."

"Ferdinand seems to be a success in the family."

"Ferdinand's a dear !" she exclaimed enthusiastically, and her partner coming up just then to claim her, I walked through the rooms in search of her sister.

After a while I found Mrs. Munday, by the gleam of her white and silver dress, among the palms in the conservatory. She sat by herself, under a crimson Chinese lantern, wearing a peculiarly seraphic expression.

"Alone ?" I said.

"Not alone !" she said significantly.

"‘My mind to me a kingdom is.’ I know you like quotations.”

“I am not thinking. I never do, unless I’m in bed. It sends one to sleep. No, there are, or were, two old cats just behind that palm—ball-room palms cover a multitude of scandal, don’t they? —busily engaged in taking away my character. I was immensely amused !”

“Weren’t you taught it’s very wrong to listen ?”

“Oh, it’s not wrong to listen to two. The number makes all the difference.”

“I see, like robbing a railway or an insurance company. Well, what did they say ?”

“I have never heard so much about myself before. It was what the novelists call an ‘appreciation.’ I think, but I am not quite sure, that it was that little wretch May Bowen—she has got a large patch of powder over her left eyebrow; I meant to tell her, but I shan’t now. The other was a woman of uncertain age and figure, and with a whole hearse of feathers on her head! I don’t know her, but I shall make it my business to.”

“To smite her ?”

“I always hit back,” said Lydia. “I shall have my little weapon ready.”

“I think I can guess what she said.”

"Yes, guess, I give you leave."

"They hinted that you are making a fool of little Davenant."

"So long as they don't hint he is making a fool of me!"

"I am not sure he isn't."

"Mr. St. Jerome!" She half rose from her seat. "There! Will that do to mark my sense of the insult? Now I will sit down again. I have known you a long time; besides, I want to hear. It is so amusing!"

"Do you like being talked about?"

"I don't mind being talked about with Cossie!"

"Because he is the son of a lord and the nephew of a duke?"

"Mr. St. Jerome! I shall really have to leave you altogether! . . . No, I don't mind, because it shows they're jealous of me—the women, I mean."

"I don't fancy many women would dispute Davenant with you."

"Now that's the first really unkind thing you have said to me! It is too bad of you, Mr. St. Jerome. He's a charming boy—awfully handsome and smart—May Bowen would give her eyes to have him about the house."

"Does Ferdinand like him about the house?"

"Oh, Ferdinand!—you know Ferdinand—do

you suppose he cares if one is alive or dead, or in mischief? He's so wrapped up in his work that I might do any mortal thing I liked, and he would never notice. If I were to tell him that I was going to elope, I believe he would forget to ask who with. Artists ought not to have wives at all . . . Is that his manly form I see leaning against the doorway?"

"Yes, it is—looking quite extraordinarily handsome . . ."

She put up her *pince-nez* and surveyed him dispassionately. "Yes, really, I have never seen him look so well . . . Will you go and tell him I am here?"

I went up to Munday and touched him on the arm. "Mrs. Munday is asking for you."

"Does she want to go home?" said he. "I have only just come. Where is she?"

"Over there, in the conservatory—at the far end."

He joined her. She still had her eyeglass raised.

* * * *

"Yes, Ferdinand, you really are——"

"What?"

"One of the—no, *the* handsomest man in the room."

"Don't, dear."

"Why not? I am looking at you from a purely

abstract point of view. You know, I attach great importance to looks."

"Then you would leave me in a moment if my hair turned white?"

"No, I shouldn't," she said tenderly. "I should make you dye it . . . I don't often consult you, but tell me, do I look nice? This dress is a supreme effort of Madame Cromer's. Horribly expensive!"

"From a purely abstract point of view, you look very well indeed."

"Why abstract?" said she absently.

"Yes, why abstract when the concrete woman is here?" He laid his hand on hers . . .

"It is rather amusing," said she pensively, "to come to a ball, and flirt with one's own husband."

"Is that a hint? Shall I go?"

"No, I like it—for a change. How dark it is out here! We might be flirting desperately, to look at us, might not we? We might be lovers——?"

"Might we, really?"

"I flirt rather nicely, I believe."

"Do you? I have never flirted with you."

"Well, Ferdinand, you once said you were in love with me—if that is anything!"

"I do believe, Lydia, that is your one idea of love—a strong flirtation."

"Perhaps—perhaps not. I don't draw these

subtle distinctions. I only know that we are sitting here in the dark—or the next thing to it—that I think you extremely handsome—and you think me——?”

“Very pretty indeed!”

“As pretty as Nevill?”

“I should not think of comparing you. You are of such absolutely different types.”

“And Nevill is your type?”

“And you are my wife,” he said simply. “I chose you, at any rate.”

“But suppose Nevill had been there first?”

“What an impossible remark!”

“Nevill wouldn’t have thought twice about the answer.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that she would have jumped at the prospect of marrying you.”

“Don’t say such things, Lydia.”

“Everybody knows she has a hopeless passion for you. A woman was talking about her to-day—a woman who did not know who I was. I wanted to hear, so I encouraged her.”

“You should have told her you were an intimate friend of Miss France’s.”

“How silly, Ferdinand! Then she wouldn’t have said another word. No, I lay low, so as to hear it all.”

"All! What could she have to say about a young girl like Miss France?"

"Oh, plenty!"

"You had better not tell me."

"You needn't be huffy, Ferdinand, when you yourself are the worst offender. You calmly get a girl to come and sit to you for hours without a chaperon, and then wonder she's talked about."

"I get her to come professionally, like any other model; but I see it won't do, I must not let her sit to me any more."

"What foolish nonsense!" exclaimed Lydia violently. Then looking at her husband out of the corner of her eye, "Set your mind at rest. No one knows in our set, and in hers it doesn't matter. I only meant that she's a Bohemian, and a Bohemian she will remain. Mrs. Bosanquet did not say anything dreadful, and not anything *at all* about you. It was only about her theatrical way of dressing, and her wild hair, and her odd bringing up, and her free-thinking father—poor girl, she can't help it! Why, we knew she was a Bohemian when we——"

"You speak as if being a Bohemian were a crime!"

"It's a misfortune. You can't touch pitch without being defiled; how if you are born in it?"

"Are you *quite* sure that there was nothing

about her sitting to me in your friend's indictment of poor Nevill? You are very blunt, Lydia, but I know you always tell the truth."

"All right!" said Mrs. Munday easily. "What a fuss you make about being talked about, to be sure!"

"It hurts a girl."

"Ah, you wouldn't care if it was me! Well, let me tell you, I am a good deal discussed—what they call talked about. I don't mind. I like it. I think a woman ought to be a little compromised, just enough to be fashionable—and no more."

"Certainly no more! But how much is fashionable? And how deeply have you thought it necessary to plunge, to be in the fashion?"

"Ferdinand, how funny you are! You are laughing. Should you really like me to be compromised?"

"I want my wife to be fashionable—no more."

"That's the point, of course—the less or the more."

"I leave the point to you. Who are you compromised with? Tell me all about it."

"Ferdinand—"

"Well?"

"I suppose it is that you trust me?"

"Of course I trust you. I know by now that you have the most level head in London, and—"

"And what?"

He took her two hands in his with a certain gravity. "And no heart at all, dear. Shall we go back to the ball-room? I have monopolized you too long."

SCENE XIV

"TWO first-class for Swanbergh!" said the man in front of me at the booking-office of the Great Northern.

At least, I thought he said two. It was young Davenant. He passed out in front of me, and I took my ticket for Harrogate, and followed him on to the platform.

It was a raw morning in August. The first rush of summer passengers was over, and the platform was not very full. There is nothing, except perhaps the polished floor of a ball-room, which subjects the "hang" of a woman's gown to such a severe test as the stretch of a nearly empty platform. Mrs. Munday's bore the test brilliantly, as she stood, a neat, compact, graceful figure in tweeds, by the bookstall. Davenant joined her, bought her some light literature, and put her into a carriage. Then he left her, and I walked negligently past the window, without looking in. I did not think she would call to me. She did.

"Mr. St. Jerome! Are you going to Swanbergh?"

"No; to Harrogate."

"Then our ways lie together as far as York."

"Do they indeed?"

"Yes; so we can travel so far together—unless you want to smoke, but you don't, you would rather talk to me, wouldn't you? I had just bought your last novel, *The Finger of Scorn*,—it is your last, isn't it?—at the bookstall, and resigned myself to boredom and sleep, when I saw you. You will be ever so much more amusing."

"I hope so."

"Now don't sham modesty. Come in! How soon do we start? Where's my idiot?"

"Do you mean Mr. Davenant?"

She opened her eyes rather unnecessarily wide.

"Mr. Davenant? I mean my porter."

"I have just met Mr. Davenant. He doesn't look as if he were quite used to being up at this time of day—a little bleary and blinky—he was taking a ticket for Swanbergh too."

"He was taking a ticket for me. Poor boy, he came to see me off! I told him he might. But we said good-bye long ago."

"I still see him hanging about."

"He wants to see the back of the train that holds

me. Come in quick!" She held open the door of the carriage.

"Are you quite sure you want me?"

"Quite! quite!—since I ask you."

I went to fetch my bag and rug. I don't know if she and Davenant met again. I could have sworn I had heard him ask for two tickets, but I supposed I was mistaken. At any rate, there was nothing for me to do but accept Mrs. Munday's imperious invitation.

"And what are you going to do at Swanbergh?" I asked, as we plunged through the bewildering maze of tunnels that succeed the station.

"I am going to see if it will do for us to go and vegetate in this autumn. One must go away, I suppose, and have some change after a hard-fought season."

"You look very fit."

"Oh, I know, I wear very well. But Ferdinand is suffering from what he calls seasonal depression. He has got neuralgia—he can't stand so many dinner-parties."

"I should think not—and work ten hours a day as well."

"Oh, Mr. St. Jerome, he doesn't work as hard as all that! Sometimes it is only nine."

"Good heavens! Is there any need for him to slave in that way?"

"He's never happy except when he's working, so what does it matter? Besides, a house like ours—though it *is* a good investment—takes a great deal of keeping going. And I go out so much I have to dress expensively. I believe I'm rather hard up——"

"You believe——"

"Where ignorance is bliss, you know—— It's no good worrying till you have to." Her eyebrows contracted a little. "But I don't let Ferdinand go buying curios now—I should like to sell some of those we've got. I wish he would buy things and sell them again, as some other artists do. It's a very lucrative arrangement, I believe. But he won't . . . Oh, I dare say it's all right. It's no good going before troubles—but if you tell any of them at home, Mr. St. Jerome, I'll kill you!" she declared, with a return to her old childish manner.

"You have been entertaining a great deal this season. Your parties are delightful."

"Are they? Are they really? Now, that's what I live for," she cried, turning a happy face to me. "I do pride myself on my parties. I treat entertaining as a fine art, don't you know, and make it a principle never to ask bores or plain women—plain women shouldn't expect to go out, should they? People who contribute nothing, and only come to look inappropriate. 'Poor things,

but they enjoy it so!' that weak Ferdinand says. Why *should* they come and enjoy themselves and make my other guests miserable? A party is a party and not a charity organization society. I always override all those philanthropic considerations——”

“Sweet society Juggernaut! What about relations and family friends?”

“I ask them to a kind of omnibus party, and they all stew in their own dullness, and are awfully pleased.”

“And haven’t you got to ask your husband’s artistic friends? He must be in with them, you know, if he is to get on.”

“Ferdinand has a club—he asks artists to dinner there. I only ask the presentable ones—with presentable wives—that’s the difficulty! You know, they all seem to have married dressmakers and dairymaids and models when they were young, and didn’t think they would ever come to be famous. That’s the way I explain it. No, I don’t care for artists. I wouldn’t let Lucy marry one.”

“Why, you have married one yourself!”

“Ferdinand is different. You see, he is very well connected. You can do anything if you’ve got a couple of duchesses or so in your pedigree: wear soft hats and polychrome shirts if you like: though Ferdinand doesn’t, thank God. He may

paint untidy people, but he dresses like a man of the world."

"You don't care for his art?" I said.

"Well—it's the fashion. But I must say I like women to have complexions even in pictures."

"You should sit to him yourself."

"Thank you, I haven't time. Nevill is coming with us to Swanbergh . . ."

"I think I see the connection——"

"She hasn't an ounce of colour, has she? I asked her to come—as our guest. Poor girl, she couldn't afford a holiday otherwise, and, really, she saves me a good deal of trouble."

"How?"

"Oh, she runs errands for me, and helps me, and plays the piano, and sings—I dropped all that when I married. Ferdinand likes it, though. It soothes him when he is nervous, and he always is now. Music is a capital derivative, he says . . . Oh yes, she'll come down with her lute and a bunch of coloured ribbons and a simper, as soon as we get a little settled. I've never seen this place, you know. It may be awfully ugly, but I don't care for scenery, and I do for comfort. I wouldn't stir a hundred yards to see the most beautiful waterfall in the world. Let it come to me if it wants me to admire it!"

"That would be practically rather unpleasant."

"Oh, you know what I mean ! Comfort before everything! . . . Well, some one told me of an hotel at Swanbergh—cheap—awfully comfortable—bracing air—plenty of nice people near to call on——"

"A little London by the sea, in fact."

"That's what Ferdinand says. But if one must go to be braced, why not be braced in good company? It struck me we might colonize Swanbergh—ask our friends down——"

"Expensive?"

"I mean they should come there to be near us, stay in the same hotel, and we should be there and make it pleasant for them. They should pay their own bills, of course."

"What an extremely adroit way of exercising hospitality!"

"Yes, isn't it clever of me? And then if they bore me, we can go away and leave them. But of course it all depends on whether I like the place. It may be hateful. This is a trial trip. After I have slept there a night, I shall know."

"And how will you know if it will suit your husband?"

"Oh, Ferdinand doesn't care in the least how he lives. For an artist he is most astonishingly innocent of fads—except his cats—and, thank goodness, he can't take them away with him.

They will have to be put on board wages. There's a great big yellow one called Jupiter—I wish you heard the way Ferdinand and Nevill go on about him. It is quite ridiculous! They talk to him—actually talk to him! Now I never get beyond 'Puss! Puss!'"

"I have no doubt they furnish all the cat stories in *The Spectator* between them. Tell me, how is Miss France?"

"Oh, she's very well . . . She's at our place now."

"Staying?"

"I asked her to come for a few days, just while I was away, to keep house for Ferdinand. He's begun a new picture of her. She sits every day. She may as well live on the spot . . . You needn't look so shocked. I've put an old woman in."

"A caretaker?"

"Aunt Elspeth." She laughed. "I did as I would be done by. She's the very chaperon I would have chosen for myself. They are always reviling me at home for not being kind to Aunt Elspeth or inviting her to come and see me, so I thought this was a capital opportunity to be civil. Ferdinand is always so nice to her. He always is nice to old women—and then they come and pester me and rave about my delightful husband!"

. . . Why, here's Grantham! I wonder which of us has talked the most? . . . Aunt Elspeth is deaf, so Nevill and Ferdinand can chatter away about the higher ethics and the higher everything to their hearts' content. I'm out of it."

" You need not be. I'd back you to take up any subject you——"

" Oh, I dare say I could get it all up if I chose," she said, " but I don't choose. It bores me. I don't care for abstractions—not built that way. And I hate arguments—arguments about things that can't in the very nature of them be settled. I don't care for philosophy, and I can only stand a very little poetry, and it must be of the very best."

" Shakespeare?"

" Shakespeare! Oh, we had him at school! Nevill and Ferdinand discuss him by the hour. I go away and amuse myself. I'm sure I am very much obliged to Nevill for relieving me of Ferdinand's surplus sentimentality. I'm not equal to immensities, they tire me. I don't pretend to sympathize with that side of my husband's nature, and I'm glad there is somebody who can. I'm no good at gush!"

" You have not, I should say, the artistic temperament strongly developed."

" And a good thing too," she broke in. " I detest the artistic temperament—I think it con-

temptible. It's just an excuse for taking all your own way and none of the consequences, for hurting other people and not saying you're sorry ; for ill-treating your wife, because you're putting her in a novel ! Whenever a man does anything dreadful or makes a particular fool of himself—it's the artistic temperament ! If an actress leads an immoral life, everybody receives her—'Poor thing ! it is the artistic temperament !' Look at Shelley ! Look at Byron ! Forgive them, for [they had the artistic temperament ! I can't stand it. I think clever people have just as much need to be good as any one else."

"Brava ! Brava ! I never heard such a fervid piece of morality from you before. You seem to have considered the question deeply."

"I suppose it is talking to Nevill. Mr. St. Jerome, I'm not narrow—I suppose I can sympathize with all the new ideas, but really, that girl goes a little too far for me."

"In practice ? "

"Oh, no ! Poor girl, she hasn't the courage of her opinions—she wouldn't have the spirit to carry them out. She's an awfully good little girl at heart ; I would trust her with my husband or untold gold."

"You do," I said meaningly.

"Never fear ! I carry my own cheque-book . . .

But Nevill is a perfect revelation to me. Her education seems to have been deplorable. Until her shady old father died, she appears to have held a sort of miscellaneous *salon* in Bohemia, where all sorts of queer people came and talked——”

“Scandal?”

“Oh no, nothing so respectable—anarchism—socialism—and improper theories generally. She has picked up all sorts of ridiculous ideas—that dreadful doctrine of the equality of the sexes——”

“You believe implicitly in the superiority of your own, don’t you?”

“How can there be equality between two things of such absolutely different denominations?” said she trenchantly, and I thought I recognized this speech as coming from a source from which this clever woman occasionally condescended to borrow —her husband.

“Miss France seems to be a very remarkable young lady.”

“Not remarkable at all, only silly!”

“And very pretty!”

“You think so? So does Mr. Verschoyle. He wants to marry her.”

“He’s a little—dreary?”

“Oh, I dare say—but he’s an excellent match. I tell her she is a perfect fool to treat him so badly.”

“She mustn’t marry him if she doesn’t love him.”

"Love! Love! People are always babbling about love. It's best to get all one's love affairs over before marriage, I think. Look at Nevill! Isn't it too absurd of her to sacrifice everything to her little fancy for Ferdinand—as if that would last all her life! A fatal passion is very picturesque and romantic and all that, and I'm the last person to object to it, although I'm his wife, but it won't make her a home and a position. I laugh at her. I say, 'You know, Nevill, it's all very well your adoring Ferdinand—great artist—*homme incompris*—intellectual sympathy—and all that, but unfortunately he's already married to me. I can't help it, so you had much better take the next best—'"

"And isn't she offended?"

"Offended? How should she be? I am only chaffing her. Lots of women are in love with Ferdinand, don't you know. He has that way of looking at each of them as if they were the most interesting persons in the world to him for the moment. He can't help it—it is his eyes. But he's not the least bit of a flirt. He is quite devoted to me and always will be! . . . I do believe this is York! I don't change, thank goodness!"

The train slowed down. I gave up my ticket and gathered together my possessions. "Now you can honour me by perusing *The Finger of Scorn*

during the remainder of the journey," I said, as I left her.

"Ah, yes," she replied absently. "Good-bye. You will come to us at Swanbergh by and by?"

But I don't think she got on very far with the humble work in question, for as I left the platform I saw Davenant sidling towards the carriage I had just vacated.

SCENE XV

"No, you none of you know how to give a picnic," said Mrs. Munday, indolently shifting a gorgeous lace parasol from one shoulder to another, and glancing round good-humouredly at us all. The sun was shining on the esplanade at Swanbergh, the band was playing, the cheerful rattle of little wooden spades and sticks was heard on the asphalte, an unlimited prospect of iron railings and lamp-posts, and a selection of her London friends gathered round her, gave Mrs. Munday a pleasant sense of civilization and urban felicity which the stretch of blue sea and yellow sand seen through these very railings did not go far to dissipate. She smiled lazily; she was quite happy. "Just you wait till I give mine."

"How will you do yours?" inquired Mrs. Bowen deferentially. She and her husband were Mrs. Munday's guests at the Royal Swanbergh Hotel—on the terms indicated by Mrs. Munday to me in our last interview! So was Miss Lucy Barker and Mr. Woffle, Q.C., whom Mrs. Munday meant to

marry to the said Lucy, and Cossie Davenant, and Mrs. Hugo Malory, who sat a little aloof from the party with an improving novel. I had not been able to find room, and had put up at the rival hotel on the other side of the harbour.

Mrs. Munday settled her cushion comfortably between her shoulders—it was Cossie's mission to carry that cushion about—and went on deliberately: "I shall be very careful to choose a fine day"—at Mrs. Bowen's picnic, the week before, it had rained hopelessly. Mrs. Munday's manner, however, appeared to indicate some special relations with the clerk of the weather! "I shall see that the livery stable people send me a pair of horses that are used to drawing a waggonette"—coming back from Davenant's party to Satwick the horses had bolted, and nearly thrown us all over the cliff! "I shall provide enough to eat,"—at Mr. Woffle's unfortunate lunch at Heygate Moss the sandwiches had given out! "And I shall have enough men to go round,"—she glanced at Mrs. Hugo Malory, at whose stately tea on the sands last week there had been a marked preponderance of ladies. "And, Mr. St. Jerome, I shall expect you to bring the great Mr. Calder-Marston."

"But I don't know him—not even by sight."

"I see by the Swanbergh list of visitors that he is staying at your hotel,"

"And if he is?"

"Oh, meet him on the stairs—knock him down by accident and apologize—you know how these things are done."

"I thought you hated actors?" I said, privately resolving that nothing should induce me to knock Calder-Marston down and ask him to a picnic, even to please the lady who exercised such a pleasant terror over us.

"As a rule. They have neither complexions nor manners. But Calder-Marston is quite the head of his profession. I've heard he is charming, and that behind the scenes in his theatre is as respectable——"

"As the aisles of a church! How wrong! But I will try and get him to come, if only for Miss France's sake."

"For Nevill! Nonsense! I couldn't allow Nevill to bore him with her dramatic aspirations—one doesn't want to do business in the country. No, I want him to add lustre to my picnic. I mean it to be *the* picnic. I shall only invite nice people."

"Who is this fearful bounder coming along?" said Davenant suddenly.

The next moment a young but large and florid personage wearing the most yellow of yellow boots, the most blazing of "blazers," and the widest of wide-brimmed straw hats, loomed portentous over

Mrs. Munday's parasol, and stretched out a large hand bulging with rings over the back of the seat towards her.

"Hullo, Lyd! Didn't expect to see me, did you? Thought I'd make a push and run over to see you. It's only a two hours' run from Manchester. Good idea, isn't it? How do, Lucy? How do, St. Jerome? Introduce me to your friends, Lyd."

But Mrs. Munday's friends had somehow drifted away, and only Lucy stood by them, looking down on her brother with undisguised disgust.

"Come and listen to the band, Miss Barker," I said. "Isn't that your favourite *Cavalleria?*?"

"Yes, go and see the cavalry, Lucy, I want to talk to Lyd."

"You'll have to ask him to your picnic!" I could not refrain from whispering to Mrs. Munday as I left her.

* * * * *

MRS. MUNDAY. Really, Fred!

FRED. Really what?

MRS. MUNDAY. Coming down on me like that!

FRED (*angrily*). Coming down like what?

MRS. MUNDAY. Like—like—well, like yourself.

FRED. Well, I'm not a repulsive object, am I?

MRS. MUNDAY (*looking at him critically through*

her pince-nez). You are a very striking object, Fred dear, in that jacket. They may well call them blazers.

FRED. I should have thought you would have been glad to see your only brother.

MRS. MUNDAY (*severely*). You should have written.

FRED. Not a bit of it! 'Soon done as thought of with me! I just saw a vacancy—things pretty slack just now—chucked a few things into a bag, and came on just as I stood.

MRS. MUNDAY. You might have stood in a decent hat at any rate.

FRED. What's the matter with the hat? Ordinary common or garden straw hat, isn't it? Mind yourself, Lyd, and see where that bow of yours is going to? It's preposterous!

MRS. MUNDAY. Fred, I don't invite you to criticize my clothes!

FRED. Look here, Lyd, don't let us look as if we were quarrelling, eh?

MRS. MUNDAY. Sit down then, and keep your stick quiet. You make me so nervous I don't know what to do. What train are you going back by?

FRED. Going back? Why, that's a good 'un! Time enough to think of that! I'm going to stay a bit, now I'm here. I like the look of that hotel

you are at. I called in to ask where you were—asked for your husband; he wasn't well, they told me.

MRS. MUNDAY. No, the place doesn't suit him—too many alkalis flying about.

FRED. Where did you get hold of that about alkalis? Well, the place suits you, at any rate, Lyd. You look ripping. Enjoying yourself, eh? I read all your fine friends' names in the hotel book . . . I see you have got the Hon. Cosmo Davenant here!

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't call him that, please!

FRED. Why? isn't he the Hon.?

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes; but you are not obliged to mention it.

FRED. Don't teach me, Lyd. I see his name in the papers constantly. I've seen *him* too—looks a delicate sort of a chap—no shoulders to speak of, but makes the best of himself—dresses well—

MRS. MUNDAY. He wears the right sort of collar, which is more than you do.

FRED. All right, I'll observe. I'm not above taking a hint from the aristocracy.

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't.

FRED. Don't what? Bless you, they've *time* to think of clothes. We're so busy making money up our way—

MRS. MUNDAY (*eagerly*). Yes, that reminds me, Fred, now you are here you may as well answer me what I have been asking you, by letter and wire, for months. You wretch! You never answer either!

FRED. Dear me! If I were to answer all the women's letters I get—

MRS. MUNDAY. *You* never get a letter from a woman except on business, I'll dare swear—and this *is* business, and I've a right to hear about my own affairs.

FRED. Look out! You're getting quite excited, Lyd.

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course—I'm anxious.

FRED (*mocking*). Was it anxious—a poor little quaking thing?

MRS. MUNDAY. I wish you would give a civil answer to a civil question, Fred.

FRED. I wish you would not bother me with business on a broiling day like this.

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't, Fred, don't for goodness' sake mop your forehead like that! They are all watching us! Look here, what about those shares that were allotted to me?

FRED. It's all right—don't you worry.

MRS. MUNDAY. You told me they'd go to a premium in a month. Have they? It's five months since I went in, and I've seen no quotation.

FRED. Haven't you? Now, that's queer, you know, *very* queer.

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't chaff me, Fred. You are no good at it; you never were. Are those shares over par?

FRED. Not exactly.

MRS. MUNDAY. What—below par? One?—two?—three? (*Fred shakes his head at each figure.*) Oh, I say! And you told me I could unload at a premium in a month!

FRED. So you could have, if—only—why, haven't you heard of the slump in mining stuff? Why, you don't know anything up in your village!

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, I'm done—simply—if it goes wrong.

FRED. I can't command the market, can I?

MRS. MUNDAY. You said you could—or I wouldn't have come in. It's too bad! I—

FRED. Calm yourself, ma'am! It's all right.

MRS. MUNDAY. Swear!

FRED (*uneasily*). Swear? What rot! What do you want me to swear?

MRS. MUNDAY. That it's all right—and Roberts and Cohen are all right—and that we're going to get something out of it.

FRED. Of course you are, silly. Why, Lyd, you used not to be a nervous fool! Has Ferdinand been making you timid?

MRS. MUNDAY (*hastily*). Ferdinand knows nothing about—I mean, I'm not timid . . . but I'm beginning to feel . . . the want of cash . . . there !

FRED. Spent all the ready, eh ? Well, sell some of that old Palissy of yours you were making such a fuss about the other day when I came.

MRS. MUNDAY. I have.

FRED. Oh, you have ? How does Munday stand it ?

MRS. MUNDAY. He hasn't noticed yet—but he will. I've sold lots of things—that majolica bowl I showed you—I got three hundred for it. But Madame Cromer soon swallowed that up—and there's the dining-room crying for a new carpet—and I've cut off the flowers for the dinner-table and put down the carriage—I say it is more convenient to hire—and I sell my old dresses, and do heaps of dreadful things that I never thought I should come down to . . . and still people clamour for money . . . and I don't like it, Fred !

FRED. There, there, don't whine—just wait for the rise—it must come, and then you realize. Mind you, it's a splendid thing, and well worth waiting for. Here ! let's talk of something else, they are all coming back . . . What's that about a picnic you are going to give ? I don't mind staying for it !

MRS. MUNDAY (*quickly*). I can't afford to give

picnics . . . Go back to the hotel for me, Fred, will you, and ask Céleste for my other parasol. This one is so heavy, I can't possibly walk home with it.

* * * *

Fred went, sulkily. I approached Mrs. Munday, who, after delivering her commission with that air of command which never failed to overawe even Fred, had relapsed into a little attitude of helplessness which rather enlisted my sympathies.

"I have been telling them all about your brother," I said.

"What?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, that he's one of the great financiers of the day, the King of Contango, and the Controller of all the Bulls and Bears of the Manchester Stock Exchange. They were immensely impressed."

"Thank you," she said quickly; adding, "May Bowen is so spiteful."

"I addressed myself especially to her."

"You are very nice," said she. She got up, and, sitting beside Mrs. Hugo Malory and Nevill, entered into conversation with some gentle commonplace uttered in the little deferential tone which she knew so well how to assume when she chose. Mrs. Bowen and Davenant presently joined us.

"I like your brother, Lydia," said Mrs. Bowen

reflectively, "something so honest and straightforward and blunt about him."

"Cat!" I said to myself.

"I wonder why I never met him at your house?"

"He lives at Manchester," said Lydia quickly, "and seldom comes to London. Our paths diverged early. He went out of my life, or rather, I went out of his. I hardly knew him at first when he dawned on us so suddenly just now."

"It's a wise sister that doesn't know her own brother," said May Bowen. "Who's got a watch? Isn't it about time we all went in to lunch? There isn't a soul left on the sands."

"I see one melancholy being walking all alone by the sad sea marge," said I, "eyes cast down—communing with the sullen ocean——"

"Did you ever see such a despairing outline?" said Lydia. "He does not look as if he were going home to a good lunch, does he? 'Looks as if he'd got nobody to look after him, nobody to cherish him——'

"Don't, Lydia!" whispered Nevill, who had seized a glass and had been looking through it. "It's—it's Mr. Munday."

Mrs. Munday broke into a nervous laugh.

"The world knows nothing of its greatest men—or their wives either, it seems. I didn't recognize him. He's meditating a picture. Go and fetch

him, Nevill. You have power to soothe the savage breast! We will go home. Won't Fred be cross," she whispered to me, "when he comes trailing all the way back with my parasol and finds us gone! I meant him to. I shall expedite him back to Manchester as soon as possible. I shan't help him to enjoy Swanbergh or allow him to flirt with May Bowen. She's quite ready to—if only to spite me. Oh, what a fighting world this is!"

SCENE XVI

AFTER all, Mrs. Munday's picnic (she waited till Fred had gone) was like most other picnics, except for the fact that all children were ruthlessly eliminated. Mrs. Malory's boys were left at home—"One of them would be sure to fall into the river, and then Mrs. Malory would have to pretend that she cared, and break up the party!" About eleven o'clock we all piled into a wagonette and drove ten miles inland to a village on the banks of a moorland stream. Then we all disposed ourselves in various cramped and uncomfortable attitudes round a large white bulgy table-cloth studded with dishes, like a well-stuffed cushion with buttons.

It was pleasant enough on the whole. The babble of the river and the popping of champagne corks made a cheerful noise. We none of us found more than an earwig apiece in our salad, and most of the spiders and caterpillars that came dangling down from our leafy roof considerably stopped short of our plates. Mrs. Munday sat at

the head of the table-cloth, robed in the most elaborate of muslin confections. It looked so simple that it must have been hideously expensive. She looked very handsome—brown as a berry, and a little stouter than she used to be—the realization of a successful rustication in the midst of the luxuries of town life.

"Doesn't Lydia love to 'boss the show'?" said little Mrs. Bowen to me. "She is quite happy—she has taken Swanbergh under her special protection. She's the Mayor and Corporation and City Police all in one! Look! she is telling my husband that she thinks the system of harbour dues in Swanbergh is faulty, and ought to be improved——"

Mr. Bowen, the American, sat on one side of Mrs. Munday, on the other Lucy's neglected suitor, Woffle, Q.C. Spite of her disinterested advocacy of his suit, with her sister, Mrs. Munday could hardly conceal her very low opinion of his social qualities. Lucy, by discreet manœuvring, had managed to place him there, and herself as far away from the sisterly eye as possible, between me and her easily suborned brother-in-law. "Lydia is so cross," she whispered; "she meant me to sit next to Mr. Woffle. Now she's got him herself. She wants me to have him for life; let us see how she likes him for luncheon!"

Opposite us sat Nevill France and Davenant—the Tragic Muse and a very sulky Antinous. They had not meant to sit next each other, either.

"I always go where I am amused, and little Mrs. Munday amuses me," Mrs. Hugo Malory had remarked when she heard of the picnic. She sat there now with an air of being willing to be entertained, beside a tall man with scanty grey hair, and no conversation at all, whom she had asked leave to bring. Nobody caught his name when she introduced him, and his company was of so negative a quality that nobody troubled to ascertain it, but it sounded like Morrison.

"I wish that delightful Mr. Fred Barker hadn't gone away," remarked Mrs. Bowen to me; "I tried hard to keep him. I liked him—so frank and unspoiled! He told me the whole history of his sister's engagement. It appears that——"

"You forget that I knew Mrs. Munday before——" I began warningly.

"Oh yes, so you did. You were always about at 56, Bedford Square. I used to think——"

In art—and innuendo—a part is better than the whole. Mrs. Bowen had grasped that great fact.

"The engagement was quite a bomb to us all," she continued. "He was so out of Lydia's set. I forget where she met him—at a foreign hotel, I believe. He *is* a nice man, isn't he? My husband

knew him long before he married—he is one of his best buyers. We've got the 'Psyche.' Mr. Munday is quite one of our leading artists now. Sure to be an R.A. I think him so handsome—rather dark, you know, but that's his French blood. He looks sad, too, doesn't he?"

"Let us call it romantic."

"And Lydia isn't the least bit romantic. She really chaffs her husband too much, doesn't she?"

"You think she freezes the genial current of his artistic soul with epigrams? I admit she has rather a talent that way."

"Anybody can make impromptu epigrams like hers, only it takes time to really think them out beforehand. I've lots in reserve myself that I haven't been able to place yet. Now there is an awfully good one—only I don't think I shall ever be able to bring it off! It needs a dinner-party, and a general, and some caviare, and I must be hostess. Then I should say to the waiter, 'Caviare to the General!'"

The superior epigrammatist at the head of the table caught this flight of fancy on the part of her friend, and smiled superior.

"When is an epigram not an epigram?" she asked carelessly.

"When isn't it one?" answered the other suspiciously.

"When it's caviare—to the general."

Mrs. Bowen subsided, and ate jam puffs with ardour. Presently—

"Do you admire Miss France? All men do."

"And all women?"

"All women say they do. Wonderful eyes, hasn't she? But they are sad too. Mr. Munday always paints from her, doesn't he? She's his type—or has he made his type like her? He has made her the fashion, at any rate. They say the President wanted her to sit to him, but she won't sit to any artist but Ferdinand Munday, and he will paint no one else. One can hardly enter an exhibition now without those great serious eyes looking down from the walls at one. I'm getting rather tired of it. I wonder his wife isn't, too."

"Have another jam puff?"

"Yes, please. It's a funny arrangement, isn't it?"

"What?"

"The Munday *ménage à trois*. But it works very well. Lydia doesn't mind a bit; in fact, I think it relieves her that Ferdinand should have some one to pour out his soul to. Now *I* should be jealous. I couldn't stand an under-study."

"I am sure Munday is the last man to encourage—to allow anything that might lead to—talk."

"Oh, don't look like that! I didn't say it was

an open scandal—and besides, he would be the last person to know it, if it was. Sinners never hear any harm of themselves. Oh, there isn't the slightest flirtation, in the strict sense of the word ; they are both incapable of it. Only an intellectual sympathy. I believe Lydia started Cossie Davenant in self-defence. He is always with her, runs her errands, carries her cloak, gets her opera tickets—I always say that the M undays are a most *fin de siècle* couple . . . ”

I hastily handed her the dish of jam puffs.

“ No, thanks, no more,” she said. “ I don't think they are so very good after all !”

She ought to have known—she had eaten eight. I could not hope to stop her little silly mouth any more with them, so I turned round and watched Ferdinand drawing caricatures to amuse his sister-in-law. They were really very funny.

“ I had no idea you were a caricaturist, Munday,” said I, “ the painter of the ‘ Footsteps of Time ’——”

“ Oh, I laugh sometimes that I may not weep,” he said, in an offhand way. “ Do you suppose because I paint people as Galahads and goddesses that I don't see them as they really are ?”

“ Yes, Ferdinand's a fearful cynic,” said his wife, “ though you wouldn't think it. A confirmed pessimist ! Schopenhauer's nothing to him. He caricatures everything, except me. I won't allow

it. Did you ever see his book about our cats? He has made them the principals; they are big instead of us, while we sit about on chairs and on the floor just as they do. I never can see the fun of it, but——”

“It might make a cat laugh,” said her husband gravely, “but you have no sense of humour, Lydia, you know.”

“Oh yes, I have. I have my own peculiar sense of humour. An Ibsen play never fails to amuse me, and the Pall Mall Theatre tragedies are delightfully comic. Last season——”

“Isn’t it getting a little damp? These September days——” interrupted Mrs. Malory, “I am rather afraid of——”

“Of catching cold, dear Mrs. Malory? Let us all go and walk about, by all means . . . I can’t get up gracefully, because of pins and needles.”

She did, however, very gracefully. Into the wood she strolled away with me—not, unfortunately, to flirt with me, but, as it proved, to scold.

“Mr. St. Jerome, I am very cross with you indeed. Poor Mr. Woffle was wretched all lunch-time because Lucy was flirting with you. Of course I know *you* weren’t, really, but I do think it’s too bad of you to prevent Lucy settling. The poor girl will never make up her mind if you will distract her so.”

"But I wanted to talk to her!"

"You don't want to marry her, I suppose, and Mr. Woffle does! . . . And I do think it was too stupid of you not to get hold of Calder-Marston for my picnic; you promised."

"But I never even came across him! Never knew which was he even——"

"You didn't take any trouble, I am sure; though you knew I wanted him. He would have balanced that dreadfully dull man Mrs. Malory brought. He spoke once—no, was it twice?—and then he said, 'It would have been better broiled!'"

"Referring to the salmon, I suppose?"

"I'm getting tired of Mrs. Malory," she remarked, as we strolled back to the circle. "She makes such an absurd fuss about Nevill. I didn't ask Nevill here to put herself forward, and I think it is very officious indeed of Mrs. Malory."

* * * * *

"I have just been asking Miss France," said Mrs. Malory rather solemnly, coming forward, "if she will have the goodness to recite something to us."

"Oh, *do* you like recitations, dear Mrs. Malory?"

"I have a very particular reason for wishing to hear Miss France," said Mrs. Malory, "and my friend, here, is very anxious too——"

"I confess I hate recitations," said Mrs. Munday

resignedly, "but if Mr.—wishes—" glaring a little at Mrs. Malory's friend.

"But Miss France won't recite! She is terribly hard to persuade—she is so diffident. Won't you try, Mrs. Munday?"

"I—I have never even heard her," said Mrs. Munday. "She may be right to be diffident—it might turn out a horrid fiasco."

"Still we are all—or nearly all—indulgent here," said Mrs. Malory, in what people called her terrible manner. "Do persuade her."

"Oh, certainly, if Nevill feels equal to it," said Mrs. Munday coldly, as Nevill approached.

"I do *not* feel equal to it," said the latter decidedly.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Malory, "to please me—to please Mr. Munday . . . Ferdinand, make her!"

"Do, Nevill," said he.

She turned round.

"I will if you wish it," she replied, with ever so slight an accent on the *you*. She took up her position in the middle of the group, drew herself up, and remained standing quite still, straight and upright. "She knows how to stand," I said to myself. Waving her hands once or twice, as if to create for herself an atmosphere, she began. It was some fashionable *morceau* or other. The

sunken eyes of Mrs. Malory's friend began to glow in the dull opaque mask of his complexion . . . he covered his eyes with his hand . . .

I write plays sometimes. I hate recitations. But there was something new, something true, about this girl's acting—a convincingness which entirely differentiated her from the hundred and one dramatic bunglers I have had to listen to in the course of my life. She was less forcible than some—less picturesque than others—but she had a 'note,' as we writers phrase it, a note of her own, absolutely personal and original. I had fancied her too clever, too argumentative, too full of theories to be a good actress, yet she now seemed to have that divine simplicity and directness which I have always considered to be the concomitant of the true dramatic temperament.

When she had done, her eyes interrogated Munday's, not those of Mrs. Malory's guest, which were, however, sedulously bent on her. He raised his eyebrows—made a few steps forward—and laid his hand in a fatherly way on her arm! . . . Then I knew who he was!

"You must come to me," he said.

* * * * *

"Her fortune is made!" said Mrs. Malory triumphantly, when Nevill and the stranger had wandered away among the trees in earnest conversa-

tion. "He took to her from the very moment she opened her lips—and he never goes back. Her future is assured. I planned it all. I brought him here on purpose. I am so glad!"

"Why? What?" asked Lydia Munday. "Who is that gentleman, and what has he to do with Nevill's future? I did not catch his name."

"That is Mr. Calder-Marston, the great actor-manager—how odd that you none of you knew him!—and he can take Miss France on at the Pall Mall Theatre, and no actress can want more than that."

* * * * *

"The horses are being put in, Nevill," said Munday, an hour later, coming up to the heroine of the hour, who was sitting in the low fork of a tree, looking gloomily down at the brown moorland water in front of her. "I am sent to look for you. Why have you run away from us all?"

She raised her face, with its reddened eyelids.

"I have not congratulated you yet," he said gently.

"I wish—I wish I could drown myself *there!*!" she said passionately, pointing to the water.

"Are you entering on your part—one of your parts—already?"

"What part?"

"The part of Ophelia?"

"Ah, I mean it," she said piteously.

"What! Drown yourself now—on the very threshold of fame—on the point of everything that makes life worth having! You should have heard what Calder-Marston has been saying about you. He is absolutely confident of your success. He is going to undertake you—to train you—to make you. Are you sorry that you are going to be a great actress?—or is it a case of *la joie fait peur?*"

She still looked straight out before her, and the tears welled slowly into her eyes. He stooped and dipped his handkerchief into the river.

"Come, dry your eyes. We must go—they will all be waiting, don't you know? It will look so odd . . . Come! You don't want my wife to chaff you, do you?"

She shuddered, took the proffered handkerchief, and obediently dabbed her eyes with it.

"It won't matter—they will understand," he murmured as they walked away. "Everybody is delighted about it."

"Lydia's eyes! Lydia's eyes! She didn't like me to recite. She is angry . . ."

"Nonsense!" said Munday gently. He looked away, embarrassed; while his companion, calling up all the resources of the profession she was now entering, composed her features and looked as if

nothing had happened, as she joined the party gathered in the porch of the inn, and quietly took the seat left for her in the wagonette beside Mr. Calder-Marston, who had eyes and ears for nobody else.

* * * * *

"No, Ferdinand . . . I was *not* jealous of her success—how could I be jealous of an actress? and if she is such a fool as to think so, and you to believe her, I can't help it! . . . I didn't make faces at her—although I think the whole performance was very ill-judged, ill-timed, and unnecessary! And how could you get me into such a hole about Calder-Marston? Couldn't you see it was he? Haven't you seen his portrait in the illustrated papers a hundred times? You very nearly let me make a fool of myself over it—abusing the Pall Mall Theatre to him—and snubbing him! How was I to know a dull, short-sighted old gentleman like that was Calder-Marston? . . . Now let me go to bed. I'm tired to death . . . Nevill hysterical, you say? Oh, let her alone, she will be all right in the morning!"

SCENE XVII

"FERDINAND! It's a lovely afternoon, and I'm going for a walk on the Scaur with Cossie!" said Mrs. Munday briskly, coming in with her hat on, to the two men who were sitting smoking after lunch.

"This is the first I've heard of it!" said Davenant lazily. "With you anywhere, but isn't it rather a grind? It's so much nicer here, in the balcony. We are sure to dislocate our ankles on those rocks."

"Don't do that!" said Munday; "that would be fatal—on the Scaur. What about the tide, Lydia?"

"Oh, the tide is all right," said Mrs. Munday easily; "not high till ten. We shall be back hours before then. Come along, Cossie. No use asking you, Ferdinand, is it? You are going to the Archaeological Society meeting at Cramont, with St. Jerome and Nevill. Adieu! Enjoy yourselves—if you can. Cossie and I will amuse ourselves in our own quiet way. We shall have

tea at Byrness, and be back to dinner at half-past seven."

* * * * *

"St. Jerome not being available, you condescend to take me," said Cossie sulkily.

"Nonsense! Mr. St. Jerome *was* available—everybody is always available—for *me*, but I preferred you because I want to talk about the novel. We get on awfully slowly, don't we?"

"We shall never finish it now," said the collaborator gloomily.

"We must. I've thought of a good name for it. I will tell you about it at tea."

* * * * *

"What do you think of the name of *Gay Gehenna* for a society novel?" she proposed, as they sat together in the tea-gardens on the links at Byrness Bay.

"I believe I could think of a more——"

"Do!" said she dryly. "Mr. St. Jerome thinks *Gay Gehenna* awfully good."

"Why did you tell him?"

"Because I tell him everything—nearly."

"I can't tell you how I dislike Mr. St. Jerome."

"Yes, you can. You often do—it's a little compliment you pay him."

"I shall never forget the way you threw me over that day to travel down here with him."

"My dear boy, what else could I do? He saw me. He would have seen you next moment. It was the only thing to be done! I only hope he didn't notice you join me at York!"

"If he had only seen the dreadful hotel you made me go to, he wouldn't have envied me! Oh, what I suffered! The——"

"You needn't particularize! What a Sybarite you are! I couldn't have had you in my hotel, now could I? And it was your own idea coming down like that! I didn't propose it."

"Oh no, you didn't propose it! You are much too clever."

"I don't know what you mean, Cossie? . . . Go and pay for the tea, and tell the old woman that her kettle didn't boil this afternoon; and that's a pity, for we shan't be coming here again."

"What do you mean?" he asked as he rejoined her; "are you so cross with me that you won't come here again?"

"Nonsense. But next week we must be going home. Everybody is gone. The Bowens left a fortnight ago, and Mrs. Malory goes to-morrow. I hate the fag ends of things. I never stay for the last of a party. And we have to pay some visits first. The Bowens want us, and the Nugents, and Lady Mauleverer. That will run to

a fortnight, and then—what are you looking so abject about?"

"I am sad because we are going home."

"'We' is good! Are you going home too?"

"I am going where you are going."

"So is Mr. St. Jerome."

"Don't tease me."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't bear it."

"People who live with me must learn to bear it."

"You have no right to tease me," he said excitedly.

"Why not? You have the temerity to come under my lash."

"But I am different."

"I shan't ask you in what way," she said carelessly, "though I know you are dying for me to. Do go and gather me some of those sea-pinks!"

"Presently."

"Now," said she, with a little stamp; "you make me tired."

"I don't care. I must tell you this, now. I am different—because I feel differently—because I care—because—" he put his hand to his throat, "because I love you—I'm in love with you—isn't it dreadful? . . . You are not listening to me! What are you thinking of?"

“I am thinking how tiresome this is of you!” she said, sighing.

“Tiresome?”

“Yes, as tiresome as measles in a house, or bursting pipes in winter . . . You’ve spoilt it all.”

“But didn’t you think? Didn’t you see?”

“I saw well enough that you were pleased to fancy yourself in love with me—it’s a little way you men have—but I *did* think you would have had the sense to hold your tongue and not spoil everything.”

“Then you knew how I felt? You were only playing with me?”

“What else should I be doing? You did not expect me to be serious, did you?”

“*I was serious.*”

“Of course you were, Cossie. It would be such an awfully bad compliment to me not to be—but that’s your affair. So long as you did not come and tell me about it in this ridiculous way and force me to snub you! Well, there’s an end of it! We were playing a game and you’ve shown your hand. You have committed the unpardonable indiscretion of all! I thought you were too much of a man—or boy—of the world!”

“But, Lydia——!”

“You are not to call me Lydia.”

"What am I to do then?"

"Look out an early train back to town to-morrow, I should think."

"You bid me leave you?"

"Please don't talk like a woman's novel! . . . No, I don't bid you do anything. You must consult your own inclinations. If you like to stay and go on as usual, do. But you are never, *never* to mention the subject to me again. I shall not do so, you may be sure."

She pushed her sailor hat off her brows with an impatient gesture, and looking out to the wide expanse of sea before her, drew a long breath. "Ah, it's too bad of you," she said, "to bring a horrid atmosphere of morbid French novel into this lovely open-air place. It's thoroughly out of keeping. I am very much annoyed."

"You have no heart!"

"You too!" she turned round angrily. "If you only knew how tired I am of hearing that! . . . What time is it?"

"I have left my watch at home."

"So have I. Let us go."

"Are you going to allow me to walk back with you?"

"Certainly. There's only one way home. I am not going to compel you to scale the cliff. You don't look fit to do it. Only remember you never

mention my heart—or want of heart—to me again!"

They set out. All the colour had left Davenant's face, he had grown suddenly flaccid, mentally and physically. He picked his devious way carefully among the fallen rocks and boulders, while Lydia, like a white-winged fluttering bird, seemed to alight on and abandon one slippery seaweed-covered basis after another, with an unerring sureness of poise that shamed him.

"You are wonderful!" he said.

"Oh, I'm a woman," she said contemptuously, "and women can do things."

"You are very, *very* angry with me?" he timidly asked presently.

"I told you you were not to allude to that subject again on any pretext whatever," said she sharply. "I dare say I shall forget it, if you'll only let me. Come along, it's getting late."

They walked along, past one deserted bay after another. The great layer of sandstone in the naked cliffs above them shone pink in the sunset, the two piers of Swanbergh rose in the distance from out the mile-long black slab of rock called the Scaur along which this melancholy couple fared in a constrained silence. Swanbergh itself was hidden by the two jutting promontories of basaltic rock, but the way lay straight before

them, marked by ruts in the rock which countless carts had furrowed in their quest of seaweed and wreckage.

They passed the first point—the Red Ness, it was called. Lydia gradually got in front of Davenant; his pace was not so good as hers. "What is that dash of white by the next point?" he said suddenly. Lydia stopped short, drew a tiny local calendar out of her pocket, and consulted it. Davenant came close to her and scanned her face anxiously.

"I made a mistake," she said; "the tide is high at seven, not ten!"

The little book dropped into a pool at her feet. Davenant's eyeglass fell from his eye with a jerk. They both of them realized the possibility that before they could reach the next headland—the one that hid the town of Swanbergh from their eyes—the waves whose leaping white crests had attracted Davenant's attention would be there before them. There was no going back, they were exactly half-way between Byrness and Swanbergh, and the cliffs that overshadowed them were unscalable between these points.

For a moment she was as pale as he was. Then, "Come along, we must do it! We have only to get past the Ness, and then it's all right. The water's very close, but it is not up yet . . . Look

here, you must 'sprint,' as Fred says. No, I don't want your arm, we shall get along best by ourselves."

She began to walk along quickly, without looking back, her eye fixed on the advancing white line of waves in the distance. A smothered exclamation from Davenant arrested her. She looked over her shoulder. He was lagging.

"What is it? What did you do? Don't slip and sprain your ankle now, for God's sake!"

"Can't we get up there somehow?" he asked feebly, pointing to the sheer wall of cliff and its moraine of loose stones at the bottom, stained black by the water that covered them twice a day. "Is it quite impossible?"

"Ask yourself," she replied shortly. "No one ever got up there, unless it was hanging to a rope attached to a rescue party at the top. And at spring-tides the water rises six feet up."

"Is it a spring-tide?"

"Yes, it is. Don't talk, please, we want all our breath now. Try not to be nervous. It will be all right, once we get round the point. Only you must walk quick—walk for your life—do you hear?"

"Oh, don't talk like that. Is there danger? Shall we be drowned?"

"It will be your fault if we are!"

She plodded on sturdily. Davenant continued to expostulate; she hardly listened to him, until he said something about going back, when she turned on him furiously.

"Go back? Why should we? We are half-way already."

"But I positively can't keep up at this rate. It's killing me. I am not used to it. I am not as strong as you. You've got such a splendid wind." His panting increased and his pace slackened.

"Here, shall I give you my arm?" she asked, with bitter contempt.

"Oh, how hard you are!" he wailed. "Don't you feel anything? I can't see . . . my throat hurts . . . I think I have a weak heart."

"Better have none at all, like me!" She seized his arm roughly and dragged him along at a good pace. The gurgle of the advancing tide as it swirled into the deep pools and rejoiced the thirsty anemones and starfish and shook the hanging seaweed, was of an agonizing significance. "Oh, come on! *come* on!" she said, panting. "We shall never do it, if you don't. Be a man! Come! Be a man!" she repeated mechanically.

"I can't—I can't," wailed Davenant. "Let me stay here and die."

"Don't be a fool! Am I going to have to carry you?"

"Leave me! Leave me!"

"I wouldn't leave the meanest wretch in the world so!" said she. "Can't you—can't you make an effort? I never thought you were like this——"

"It's no good, Lydia—Mrs. Munday——" He lurched, caught his foot in a cleft of the rock, and came down heavily.

Lydia stopped too, and scanned the distant goal. "I can't drag him there," she said to herself, "and the water is up by now—would be up before we got there. It is no good! I could not even get there alone."

She turned round to where Davenant lay prone.

"Here, have you sprained it? No? Make an effort then!"

He struggled to his feet and looked round wildly, first at the grey line of water a few yards away, and then at the sheer wall of cliff, and shuddered.

"I don't know what to do!" said Mrs. Munday, standing still beside him. She too looked round her at empty sky and sea and cliff, but she did not shudder. "There's a place further on—that I know of—a ledge of rock that juts out," she said aloud. "I have noticed it. It may be above high-water mark. I believe it is. I have heard sailors say there are one or two places that the tide

doesn't cover. We will try for it? . . . Take your time!" she said bitterly, turning to Davenant, "there's no hurry now! The water is up to the Ness by this, but it won't come up here for another hour, I expect. Here, take my arm. I wish we had a rug or something—my jacket even."

"I've dropped it!"

"What a pity! I might have lent it to *you*. We may have to sit up there till daylight—if we aren't washed off before!"

"Don't—don't!"

"You had better look death in the face—it is staring pretty hard at you! . . . Here's the place! . . . Now, get up! . . . Put your foot there—on the flat place—it looks dry, doesn't it, rather?" she asked anxiously.

They established themselves on the flat top of a boulder that lay just under the lee of the cliff about five or six feet above the level of the rocky floor. She tucked her feet under her, and sat like a little Chinese bonze, staring straight in front of her, and turning her shoulder to Davenant. Once established, they sat in silence. There was nothing to do but to wait, and hope that their refuge should prove to be above high-water mark.

"I wish it was darker," murmured Cossie. "It makes it worse to see the water coming nearer and nearer. It's so dreadfully suggestive . . ."

"Ah, you're a poet, you see. If I am to die I do not care if it is in the dark or daylight. I should like to choose my company, though."

"We are as near God by sea as by land," muttered he, with the air of one repeating comfortable texts.

"Don't cant because you are afraid!"

"You said, 'For God's sake!' twice just now!"

"Did I? I dare say! I don't remember. But say your prayers by all means. Don't mind me."

"How can you chaff in such a moment?"

"Please don't bother me!" she said irritably. "Don't you see I'm not thinking in the least of what I am saying! I am trying to see if there are any boats out. If we could hail them they would take us off. . . . Perhaps Ferdinand will come? . . . I told him we were going on the Scaur, if only he remembers. Here, give me your handkerchief."

He produced his, and she knotted it to hers and tied them both to her parasol.

"You managed to keep your parasol?" he asked, surprised.

"And my head too, luckily! One of us had to."

She waved the improvised flag to and fro energetically, though it was growing too dark for it to be distinguishable in the general autumn greyness. In her light dress she looked like a frail butterfly dashed against the iron cliff, a delicate patch of

pink on the vast wall of dark rock behind her. The waves began to gurgle at the foot of their pinnacle, and Davenant shivered.

"At any rate, it isn't cold!" she remarked brutally. "If you only had your watch we might at least know what to expect."

"Why? How do you mean?"

"Because then we should be able to tell how much higher the tide has to rise before it's high water. Well, you haven't got it, so we must just wait."

It grew darker and darker. There was a long interval, when neither spoke. Davenant, in a helpless, half-comatose condition, sat huddled limply together and watched the acute profile Mrs. Munday unalterably turned to him. His teeth chattered loudly.

"I can't offer to lend you my coat," she said scornfully, "because you have lost it."

"No, but you could——"

"What?"

"Not turn away from me so! It seems so dreadfully lonely!"

"Oh, I'll look at you, if you like," she replied, turning round and facing him with a cold, careless, cynical stare. She did not even remove her eyes or wince as a shower of heavy stones came rattling down the cliff and fell with a hard metallic ring

on the rocky floor below. The young man uttered something between a cough and a whimper, and held out a tentative hand—

“I wish—I wonder if—could you give me your hand to hold—something human——”

“Certainly, if you wish it!” She extended her warm, strong, nervous hand—the other held the flag—and his closed on it in a fervid pressure born of cold and terror, that had no other human emotion in it.

She left her hand in his, but her gaze became insensibly averted from him. They sat there in much the same position for an hour or more. The dusk came on, and the waves lapped horribly at the foot of their shelter. Now and then she laid the improvised flag down and felt nervously round the edge of the rock to see if the water had risen to its level. Then it grew quite dark, and she laid the useless signal entirely aside, and supported her chin on her hand——

“To die—with you!” she said bitterly, under her breath, looking at Davenant, who seemed almost unconscious, and whose hand grew colder and colder in hers.

* * * * *

Then there was another noise, as well as the washing of water—the pounding of heavy sea-

boat oars in the rowlocks. A boat with three men in it came round the point.

She shook the damp hand she held violently. It fell away, inert.

"Wake up, and yell—if you can." She raised her own voice and called loud and shrill.

"All right!" came Ferdinand's voice across the few yards of water. "Keep still! Can you hold on?"

"All right!" she called back. "No hurry!" She stood up, and untied the handkerchief from the parasol.

* * * * *

"I knew you would come!" she said to her husband, looking down on him as he stood in the boat below.

"Jump—can you?" he said shortly.

She did jump, with the greatest precision gauging the place she was to attain in the boat.

"He can't," she said, designating the helpless figure of Davenant, whom even the chance of rescue had not revived. "You will have to fetch him somehow."

* * * * *

They were both safely aboard in a few moments. Davenant lay in the bottom of the boat, beyond the two sailors, covered with rugs. Ferdinand was

steering. His wife sat upright in the stern, her parasol in her hand.

"What put it into your head to come, Ferdinand?" she asked carelessly.

"My dear, I always assume that if any one is missing at Swanbergh, the Scaur is the place to find them. So I got a boat and two sailors and came."

"Clever of you! Tell me—that ledge—would it have been covered?"

"Yes, it would."

She shivered a little, for the first time.

"I should have been drowned with *that*," pointing to Davenant.

"It would have been a little—grotesque, certainly," said her husband.

"I shall never speak to him again," she said, in a voice that reached no further than his ear.

"Why?"

"Because he's what I hate most in a man—a coward!"

SCENE XVIII

"READ it out!" said the painter. "I think it would inspire me."

"It was Fiammetta who had inhabited the skies," read Nevill. *"She came nearer . . . more tenderly, more earnestly . . . she held the dewy globe in both hands. 'Remember your prayer and mine, Giovanni! . . . Drink, but do not spill.' . . . Sweet as was the water, sweet as was the serenity it gave me . . . alas! that also which it moved away from me was sweet! Tell me, what was it that moved away from Boccaccio?"*

"Remembrance," said Ferdinand. "Francesco had prayed to forget. He has a dream in the early rainy morning, when the rain drips from the eaves, and a little bird chirps in the fig-tree. He sees his dead mistress, bearing the chalice that holds the waters of oblivion. At the bottom of it lies their first kiss. Then she stoops, the broad leaf of the lily in her hair (I suppose it was a kind of arum) hides her brow and eyes, and the light

of heaven shines through it—I haven't looked at Landor for years, yet I remember the very words, almost. I always wanted to paint that light of heaven shining through the lily."

"And must I look all that on a cold morning in January?—and after your party last night, too!"

"You can't help looking like it, whether you try or not," he said admiringly. "You are the very Fiammetta that Boccaccio knew—at least you are my idea of her. And that dress is the very dress she might have worn. A woman made it for me once."

Nevill got up on the platform. "Where's my globe?" she said shortly.

He gave it her, and very diffidently altered the position of a tress of hair on her forehead. Her face grew solemn under his touch.

"Don't look miserable," he said, stepping back. "Remember you are a blessed angel in heaven, and you come to poor earth-bound Ser Giovanni, with a vision of his past life. He wishes to consign all his worldly recollections to the bosom of God, lest they trouble his repose among the blessed. The joys will not return, nor yet the sorrows. Is it not a strange mediæval idea?"

"I don't want to forget either," said she passionately. "I don't mean to forget anything. The remembrance of happiness is next best to happy-

ness itself. I live in the past and in the future—never in the present."

"I know you do, and you run a very poor chance of being happy, I am afraid. You should take short views, like Lydia. It's the only way! It's my way. After all, give an artist leave to paint, plenty of light and a good model to work from, and he asks for nothing else—or ought not to."

He looked at her; the long, long look of a painter taking in his subject.

"I must have something round your neck—something green—something in the shape of a necklace. Lydia had one that would do exactly. Where is she?"

"She is interviewing the cook. I think she—Mrs. Parker was being very insolent, I thought."

"Why doesn't Lydia send the woman away at once?" said he absently, looking at his model through half-closed eyes.

"That's what I say, and then Lydia says I don't understand housekeeping. It's true, I never knew what it was to have a 'home' in the conventional sense of the word . . . Shall I go and ask her for the necklace?"

"No, we will try to do without. I dare not risk an avalanche of domesticity. But remind me to get some arum lilies before you sit to me again."

Presently the door opened, and Mrs. Munday

walked in. She had a rudimentary dress-bodice dangling in one hand, and a small, almost decorative, ink-stain on her chin.

"Brr!" she said, "how your fire smokes, Ferdinand! You aren't minding it, I suppose. You transcendental creatures seem to need a mere mortal to look after you!" She began to batter at the coals with a poker. "When you've done sitting, Nevill, will you come and help me to put the sleeves in this bodice? My dear girl, you look pretty cheap! Late hours don't suit you—and what sort of a blue rag is it you've got on?—and what *are* you doing with that old gold-fish globe?"

"Never mind, Lydia," said Munday, laughing. "It would take too long to explain Boccaccio's dream to you. Don't poke the fire, for heaven's sake! You are disturbing the mediæval atmosphere—filling the room with dust, I mean."

"Oh, keep up your crystal calm, by all means. I won't interfere with it—I haven't time. I've got to keep the house going and wrestle with wild beasts in the kitchen—the cook more especially."

"What's the matter with the cook?"

"The woman's insolent, that's all!"

"Send her away then."

"Just like a man to say that! I can't afford to send her away just now."

"I don't think she's anything wonderful. The supper last night was simply abominable."

"It wasn't meant to be a supper—light refreshments."

"I won't give light refreshments in my house, please, Lydia. And where did you get the champagne? I could not drink it."

"Oh, you, you're a judge—but—"

"I told you never to give less than seventy-two shillings a dozen. This can't have been more than thirty. It wasn't good enough."

"Oh, pooh! Champagne's champagne."

"No, it won't do, Lydia. I'm not particularly keen on giving parties, but if you ask people at all, you must treat them properly, for the honour of the house. I can't have my friends asked here to eat cress-sandwiches, and drink champagne at thirty shillings the dozen. And why are you having rows with the cook? What does she want?"

"She wants her wages, as it happens," replied his wife coolly.

"Well, give them to her, and send her away. She is not good enough for us."

"Give her her wages because she clamours for them? No, indeed! I refuse on principle. Those who ask, shan't have; those who don't, don't want—eh, Nevill?" said she, pinching the girl's cheek with a patronizing air.

"But if the wages are due?" reiterated the husband.

"That doesn't affect the question at all. Ferdinand, you are too literal for anything! Now let me go. I am doing my accounts."

"Yes, I see, you've inked your little chin. By the way, will you lend me that chrysoprase and diamond necklace of yours? It's so long since you wore it, I've almost forgotten it, but I believe it is just what I want."

"That rubbishy old thing!"

"Rubbishy! Well, I have a strong recollection of having given £120 for it in Berlin once."

Mrs. Munday started.

"Did you, really? Then the man cheated me."

"Cheated you? What man?"

"Levi," said she quickly. "I went and had it valued."

"A present?"

"I like to know what my things are worth. Well, it's no matter, for it wouldn't be of the least use to you—would not go with that picture a bit!"

"Do go and get it, dear, and permit me to judge for myself."

"But I haven't the very slightest idea where it is."

"You—the tidiest woman in London!"

"Well, I'll go and see," said she unwillingly, "but I *know* I shan't find it."

In five minutes she returned and said triumphantly—

"I've just remembered—Levi's mending it, and they always keep things for months! Now I'm going. I cannot waste any more time." She came forward and kissed him with a proprietary air. "Please, Ferdinand, the cats are *not* to sit on the chairs! They scratch them all to pieces!"

"Oh, let them—we can get new chair-covers."

"Nonsense!" said Lydia, sweeping Jupiter off the Empire couch with a vigorous backhander. "Go down, Jupiter, and tell the others to go down too. Jupiter ought to be shot—he's getting old and blind and useless. I shall have to see about it! There, you needn't both writhe! I was only joking. This tiresome door of yours, Ferdinand! I never can open it quietly—or shut it either—without a bang."

She did bang it. Munday looked at his model ruefully.

"Shall we try to go back to Boccaccio?" he said.

* * * * *

"I'm going to work like the devil!" he announced presently, "if you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind."

For three-quarters of an hour no word passed

between them. The pose was a severe one, and Nevill was not professional. By and by her head drooped, the muscles of her neck grew sharp, and the curves of her shoulders relaxed ; her eyes became anxious in expression, and closed every now and again, though she carefully chose for that process the intervals between Munday's glances, which grew rarer and rarer. He was working from his own idea. Then came a time when she lost control over her eyelids——

“Mr. Munday,” she said timidly.

“Oh—um——”

“Are you getting on?”

“Splendidly.”

“Then I won’t move.”

“No, don’t, please—if you love me! You look more like Fiammetta than ever—so frail—so pale! One moment!——”

“All right!” she panted.

“Am I a selfish brute to you?” he asked absently.

“No, no—only I can’t stay like this much longer.”

“Can’t you?” The creative frenzy was on him, and he scarcely knew what she was saying. He was aroused by the sharp click of the crystal bowl against the *estrade*, as it dropped from her hands, and broke in atoms.

"Good heavens! What a brute I am!" he cried, and sprang forward just in time to catch his victim as she slipped down, a senseless heap, into his arms.

"Don't call Lydia," she muttered, as she lost consciousness.

An artist of all men is least embarrassed when a woman faints. The matter is of such frequent occurrence in a studio. He laid her down flat; he dexterously flipped a few drops of cold water into her ashen face, and while her eyes were still closed he held a glass of pretty stiff brandy-and-water to her lips. In a very few moments she opened her beautiful eyes, and smiled in his face, as he bent over her.

"Ah, you look so happy," he said. "Can you ever forgive me for being such a thoughtless wretch?"

"I thought I had died," she said, stretching out her long arms. "I thought I was Fiammetta . . ."

"Fiammetta who had inhabited the skies? Fiammetta the angel? And you came back——?"

"To you!" she said dreamily, and her eyes closed again.

"But, Fiammetta, you have spilt the waters of forgetfulness—see!" He pointed to the broken fragments of Venetian glass on the floor, half laughing. But she was desperately serious.

"I don't want to forget—do you?"

"No, no," he answered vaguely, stroking her hand, as if she were a child, and looking away from her into the tapestry hung depths of the big studio.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked presently, still in the same level, unintelligent, hypnotized tones.

"Of you," he replied, still not looking at her.

After a while she returned to a more normal state; her shoulders straightened, her eyes opened and stayed open. She took her hand away from his and looked round shivering.

"I must go home."

"Not yet, you can't . . . Drink some more."

"What?"

"Brandy. I gave you some just now when you were half unconscious."

"I ought to hate it—but I don't," she said, sitting up.

"No, for you are weak and want it. Now, sit down by the fire and don't think of anything yet awhile, and then I will take you home. You are quite sure you would not like me to fetch my wife?"

"Quite sure! Oh, you are not going to call her?" she almost screamed, as he went towards the door.

"No, no, I won't. I promise you . . . I am only going to fetch something to put over you!"

Her eyes followed him as he went to a press and brought various garments forth. He hid the pale brocade gown of the Italian *donzella* under the purple silk mantle of the lady of the First Empire, and gave her a large English eighteenth-century muff to put her cold hands in. She smiled the pretty apologetic smile of weakness as his deft hands adjusted them.

"There, the centuries meet on you," he said, laughing, and at her bidding went back to his easel.

"Do you want to talk?" he asked her presently.

"Yes, but I can't talk sensibly—my head swims. You gave me too much."

"Not half what I have to give Peggy Merridew when she feels faint, or says she does. It's all right. You can recover here . . . Tell me, did you enjoy yourself at our party last night?"

"Yes, only——"

"Only what? You had a good time. I saw you. You monopolized the great Mr. Calder-Marston."

"I know, I couldn't help it. Lydia said——"

"Why should you not? He only comes here to see you. What was he talking about to you so earnestly?"

"He was talking business—about my—what he is pleased to call my career."

"Yes, you are neglecting your career," said he seriously. "You are not profiting by the impression you made on the greatest manager of the century. Tell me what he said."

"He wants me to go down into the country——"

"Yes?"

"To go down to Hastings and do some stock season with Mrs. Valpy—she's Marischal's sister, you know, and runs a provincial company where they train young actresses."

"Well, that's a very good way to begin. I am glad he doesn't want you to begin by walking on or being under-study at the Pall Mall Theatre. It sounds smart, but it isn't half as good as a thorough provincial training, I should say."

"Yes, but it means leaving—London!"

"Well, have you any objection to leaving—London?"

"It is my life—London."

"I know, but you must follow where your fate leads. It's the same for a woman as for a man, one must work it out—wherever it falls."

"Shouldn't you miss me?" she almost wailed.

"Miss you? . . . miss you? . . ." he seized a piece of rag and rubbed earnestly at a spot on his picture. "Of course I should miss you—

horribly. I might as well give up painting at once."

"Oh—painting!" she said. Then, after a pause, "Well, that decides it, don't you see?"

Ferdinand slid his brush into the sheaf he held, and came and stood over her.

"My dear child . . . I am going to talk to you like a father. May I?"

"Yes, if you feel like one," she said defiantly. Her cheeks were red; she was more like Fiammetta before her earthly career was closed, than the pale angel with half-closed eyelids who had stood on the platform half-an-hour ago.

"I do—at this moment. You have no father, and I have your interests at heart as nearly as any father could have. Nevill, I must not allow you to throw over this chance, to let it slip as I see you are doing. I did not realize it all till now. You must not neglect your opportunity for the sake of helping me. It would be too base of me to sacrifice your whole future to a selfish desire to paint from you! I won't. You have got such a chance as not one actress in a thousand has. The biggest manager in London takes an interest in you, and is willing to undertake your training. He thinks it worth while. Consider what that means. Your fortune is made. You would have a position; you might be famous—you would be famous. Don't you care?"

"Yes, but——"

"You have always cared more for acting than anything else in the world."

"That was when I was a child."

"But it is your vocation. Why, I heard you myself at Swanbergh, you were wonderful! I never told you what I thought about you. You can't throw such a gift away. You have no right to. You are a working woman, you earn your living. This is the way you can make it easiest. It will be a hard training, at first, of course. You will make nothing for a long time, but later on—it will be a good deal more lucrative than sitting to me."

"More lucrative!" She stared. "I don't understand."

"I mean that what we give you is nothing to what you would earn when you are once fairly established as an actress!"

"You give me!—You give me nothing but kindness!"

He looked at her with a growing sternness that was not meant for her. "I understand," he said slowly, "that my wife pays you for your time in sitting to me? Is it not so? Forgive me if I put it baldly."

"Pays me for sitting to you? Good heavens!"

"What! She doesn't?" He made a step forward——

"Do you mean to say that you think I would let her pay me?"

"I don't know what you would do—I only know what I thought she did . . . what I made her promise . . . She made *me* promise not to speak of it to you—said it would hurt you if I talked of it—she bade me leave it all to her, and I did. Good God!"

"Sit to you for money!" she said, sobbing.

"Of course; what else?" said he passionately. "What else should you sit to me for? For love?" He walked up and down the room without looking at her. She raised her hands imploringly . . .

* * * * *

"I've got the sleeve in all right without you, Nevill!" exclaimed Mrs. Munday, entering noisily, "and I've come to tell you two poets that lunch is ready. What was that I heard about Love? Have you got to that already? Really, my dears——!"

"Be quiet, Lydia. Will you go and dress, Miss France, and then I'll see you home." He dashed the palette and sheaf of brushes down on an embroidered Turkish table-cloth, and turned to his wife. She carefully removed the brushes and palette . . .

"Don't touch them!" he said sharply.

"Why do you call her Miss France? Why isn't

she going to stay to lunch when I ask her? Why must you see her home?"

"Because she is ill. I made her sit to me till she fainted dead away. Before she comes back will you please answer me a question? Have you never paid her for her sittings as we agreed you should?"

"Did she let that out? Little sneak!"

"No, Lydia, *she* isn't the sneak. Will you explain?"

"I decline to be bullied."

"I am not bullying you. I only want to know. There must be some explanation? Have I been behaving like a cad without knowing it, all these months? It looks like it—making a slave of her—ordering her about as if—— Heavens, it is too intolerable! Can't you speak, Lydia?"

He seized a chair, and dashed it against the ground.

"I refuse to discuss the question with a maniac. I never knew you had such a vile temper, Ferdinand."

"I beg your pardon . . . Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me how you came to allow me to remain under the impression that you were—that you undertook to remunerate Miss France for her services?"

"Because *she* wouldn't hear of being paid, and

you wouldn't have allowed her to sit for you unless you had thought she was," said Lydia sturdily. "It was a deadlock. What was I to do?"

"So you lied to us both! Well, there's no more to be said." He turned away.

"No heroics, if you please, Ferdinand, and it isn't the thing to tell a lady she lies!"

"It isn't a thing for a lady to do. God! Lydia, if you were a man!"

"Oh yes, I dare say you would knock me down. Unfortunately I am a woman and your wife. And what on earth are you making such a fuss about? You were wild to get this particular girl to sit to you—you both had fine feelings—I'm not troubled with that sort of thing, so I managed it for you! I think you ought to be grateful to me, instead of storming at me like this."

"Oh, don't you see, Lydia—don't you *see* what a damned thing it is you have been making me do! I have treated the poor girl like a paid model, neither more nor less. I have ordered her about, and taken up her time, and kept her from her profession. I thought I was at least helping her to earn her living—that is, if I thought about it at all! But I have only thought of making use of her. I have worked her—bullied her—made her sit to me to-day until she fainted——"

"You needn't be unhappy about that! She had

the privilege of fainting in your arms, that would make up for anything! . . . Don't look at me so, as if you hated me! Perhaps you imagine I'm jealous of a little gutter-girl like that?"

"Oh hush, for God's sake, here she comes!"

"Clothed and in her right mind! Now, Ferdinand, put her in a cab—you can pay it if you like—and then come back to me! Look, Nevill, Ferdinand will put you in a cab and—"

"No, thank you," said Nevill. She was no longer pale, but flushed; her lips were pressed together, and she had assumed a kind of artificial serenity and dignity. "I am perfectly well now. I won't take Mr. Munday away from his work. Don't come with me, Mr. Munday, I beg you."

Into her eyes she threw a power of command which he could not but obey. She shook hands and went out, closing the door quietly behind her, leaving these two looking at each other.

SCENE XIX

In Nevill's rooms in Talgarth Mansions. Five o'clock.

MRS. MUNDAY (*rising from her chair*). So you see, Nevill, there it is! I have explained it all to you. You didn't see what dreadful inconvenience you were putting us to! Did you? And after we have been so kind to you always! I didn't say a word to my husband, but directly I got your tragic little letter I put everything aside, and came here . . . These fearful stairs of yours are no joke, I can tell you . . . So you'll come and sit to-morrow, as usual? You *must* let us pay you—a little, at any rate, for Ferdinand absolutely won't have you sit on any other terms. He's so quixotic. You must humour him. Good-bye! *A demain.* Ferdinand doesn't in the least expect to see you. How surprised he will be!

NEVILL. He won't see me. I'm very sorry, Lydia, but I meant all I said. You must take me at my word. I can't come to you any more.

MRS. MUNDAY (*aggrieved*). And here I've been talking to you about it all for the last hour, telling you how tiresome and wrong-headed you were, and you didn't say anything——!

NEVILL. You never gave me a chance.

MRS. MUNDAY (*plaintively*). Oh, I never knew any one so hard to persuade as you !

NEVILL. Will you leave off trying, dear Lydia ? It is very kind of you, but—I can't. I have made all my arrangements, as I told you in my letter this morning. I have accepted Mr. Calder-Maston's offer, I am going to put myself in his hands, I have let my flat for the remainder of my lease, and I am going down to Hastings the day after to-morrow, to begin work with Mrs. Valpy's company in earnest. I am an actress, not a model any more.

MRS. MUNDAY. And you actually mean to throw us over entirely—leave Ferdinand in the lurch with an unfinished picture on his hands ?

NEVILL. It is very nearly done. He can finish it without me.

MRS. MUNDAY. No, he will never finish it. It will be wasted. I know him. You don't. You don't know the delicate sensitive artist nature. Oh, I didn't think you could be so abominably hard and selfish. For the sake of your wretched pride, you are going to hurt him in what he cares most about, his art——

NEVILL (*earnestly*). No—no—it isn't that, believe me! Sooner than injure him I would put my pride aside and let him pay me. I would do anything, only—only—

MRS. MUNDAY. Only?

NEVILL. I can't come any more to your house (*stubbornly*).

MRS. MUNDAY. But why then, why? For Ferdinand's sake—I don't ask you for mine—I knew you never cared for me—but if you cared in the very least for Ferdinand—

NEVILL (*looking at her*). But I did—I do—and the real reason . . . Oh, Lydia, don't you see? Don't make me tell you—

MRS. MUNDAY. I'm not more obtuse than most people, I suppose, but I confess I cannot see why you should quarrel with your bread-and-butter—at least, it *will* be your bread-and-butter—in this ridiculous way. You have got some foolish notion or other into your head, I imagine.

NEVILL (*sadly*). Yes—very foolish. Don't think I don't know it. I love your husband. (*Turns her face away*.)

MRS. MUNDAY (*coolly*). Well, we all knew that. You needn't start and look so ashamed!

NEVILL. I thought—

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, you thought it was a dead secret, I suppose? My dear child, don't flatter

yourself; anybody could see it with half an eye. Do you suppose people didn't see your face light up when Ferdinand spoke to you—didn't see you follow his movements like a little dog with your great eyes—didn't notice your voice alter when you spoke to him? It was as plain as a pikestaff. People have often chaffed me about it.

NEVILL (*under her breath*). And did he know?

MRS. MUNDAY. Not unless you told him. Ferdinand never sees what is before his nose. And I'll do him this justice, he's not a flirt; a woman might make eyes at him all day, and he would not even notice her.

NEVILL. Well, then, Lydia—you see—(*bitterly*) especially if I am the laughing-stock you say—I could not very well go on coming to you.

MRS. MUNDAY. Why not, since I've no objection? I should never make a fuss. Women are perfectly at liberty to adore my husband as much as they like. It amuses them, and doesn't hurt me! Oh, I'm modern enough for that. I don't go in for poaching on other people's preserves myself—I don't think it's good form—but as for being jealous—why, I wouldn't raise a finger to bring back a man who had left off caring for me! I'm much too proud. But I know Ferdinand is mine—mine entirely. I could trust him with the prettiest woman in London. He looks upon you

as a mere child—a pretty child. You amuse him. Come, don't be a sentimental goose, drop this nonsense and come back to us. Besides (*coaxingly*), I can't do without you, you are so nice and useful about the house.

NEVILL. You will have to get another useful maid. (*Passionately*.) Oh, don't you see, Lydia,—I am a woman, I am not made of stone—I suffer. You came in and kissed him the other day, in my presence—you have a right to, of course—but have you no heart—no feeling? Can't you understand what it is? How can I go on living with you both day after day, as I have practically done? I can't bear it—it would be dreadful, it would be wrong!

MRS. MUNDAY (*sneering*). Virtuous scruples! Come now, if I don't mind, I don't see why you should.

NEVILL. We are different, I suppose.

MRS. MUNDAY (*angry*). Oh yes, different. Are you trying to snub me? I have no doubt you fancy Ferdinand would end by falling in love with you. I've no doubt you think that you would make him a far better wife than me—affinities and all that. Outsiders always think they can manage things better than the people whose own business it is.

NEVILL. Oh, no—no—I only love him!

MRS. MUNDAY (*sharply*). Do you wish to insinuate that I don't?

NEVILL. I don't know whether you do or not, I only know that I do, more sorrow for me. And I have had to confess it to a hard woman like you—and you want me to go on coming to your house—to be in his company, day after day—to watch you and him . . . You don't see anything in it—you are happy and confident—you are in the sun, and I am in the shade. I tell you I could not bear it. I am jealous, even if you are not. There! I have said a dreadful thing.

MRS. MUNDAY. Nonsense! How can any one be jealous of what isn't their own property?

NEVILL. I don't know. I only know it drives me mad. I can't sleep, I can't think—I—

MRS. MUNDAY (*looking at her curiously*). I really think love with you morbid women is a kind of mania.

NEVILL (*passionately*). Love! Don't talk of love! You know nothing about it!

MRS. MUNDAY (*putting up her eye-glass*). That's a funny thing to say to a married woman! A little impertinent, isn't it? But you don't mind what you say. You do say the most extraordinary things. You quite shock me sometimes. Indeed, I am quite surprised that, with your theories, you see any harm in being in love with a married man? (*Sneering*.)

NEVILL. What do you mean?

MRS. MUNDAY (*coldly*). I mean that I wonder you miss an opportunity of putting your very peculiar views on the relations of the sexes into practice.

NEVILL. Lydia, how dare you—how dare you insult me so!

MRS. MUNDAY. There you go! Dare! Insult! All in a moment! Just like you advanced women! Go about spouting the most fearful opinions about love and marriage and all that, and the moment one so much as suggests that they should have some of the courage of their opinions—pouf! they flare up, and are ready to slay you, in their righteous indignation!

NEVILL. Lydia—please go—before I—

MRS. MUNDAY. Nonsense, my dear, calm yourself! I tell you I hadn't the least idea of insulting you, I was only stating a curious fact . . . You'll be better in a moment. (*Putting up her pince-nez.*) It's odd, but I couldn't get into a rage like that—no, not if you paid me! It was extremely effective, let me tell you, dear. I believe you will be an actress after all! . . . Well, won't you speak? . . . Look here—we're two sensible women of the world, are we going to quarrel like the Queens in *Siegfrid*? I never quarrel on principle. I defy anybody to quarrel with me—even a little spit-fire like you.

NEVILL (*slowly*). No, we are not going to quarrel, we are going to say good-bye. We are not going to meet again—never, never! Why should we? I have nothing in common with you—

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh no, not with me—only with my husband.

NEVILL. I shall never see your husband again.

MRS. MUNDAY. Until next time! Oh, I know it!

NEVILL. Never as long as I live.

MRS. MUNDAY. You will hope to meet in another and better world! Oh, I'm up to all that jargon. (*Rising from her chair.*)

NEVILL (*very low*). I am afraid there isn't another world . . . but if there is . . . I think a man will belong to the woman who loved him best on earth.

MRS. MUNDAY (*putting on her veil before the glass on the mantel-piece.*) Oh, leave the poor fellow some choice! Say to the woman *he* loves best! And I suppose you have no pretensions to that? . . . No, don't, I can tie it . . . Good-bye! I think we had better part, as you say—*much* better. It would never do. You're too much for me; I couldn't stand much of this sort of thing! . . . I can open the door myself, thank you! *Good-night!*

[*Exit.*]

SCENE XX

MUNDAY (*to the servant*). Tell Mrs. Munday that the carriage is here, and that I am ready. (*He strolls round the vestibule with his eyeglass raised, pausing in front of a water-colour drawing.*) Is that mine? By Jove, it is! Now where did Lydia fish that out from? I thought I had sent it to the devil long ago. The "Jason and Medea" used to be there! That's gone too! . . . I don't know how it is, but it all has a very undressed look!

MRS. MUNDAY (*coming slowly down the stairs*). You ready first, Ferdinand? What a wonder! (*To the servant.*) Celestine, don't forget to turn out the light in my room—and post those letters on my table—and if that woman from Madame Cromer calls again, say— (*She mumbles something as her cloak is being put over her shoulders.*)

MUNDAY (*fretfully*). I don't like that dress at all, Lydia.

MRS. MUNDAY. What's wrong with it?

MUNDAY. For one thing, it doesn't fit.

MRS. MUNDAY (*plaintively*). Please don't. I made it myself—most of it.

MUNDAY (*laughing*). Oh, well then, I dare say it's a triumph. Since when have you taken to making your own dresses? What has become of the great, the indispensable Cromer?

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't fuss me, Ferdinand, I'm sure I don't know. (*Getting into the carriage*.) Now mind, Céleste, you give that message properly. Come along, we're late. Eighty-nine, Brook Street! . . . Take my dress over your knee, Ferdinand, will you? It crushes so.

(*A pause*.)

MUNDAY (*suddenly*). Where have you put the "Jason and Medea" that used to hang under the eagle mirror in the hall?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, isn't it there?

MUNDAY. No, it isn't, and that water-colour you have put in its place won't do. It isn't good enough. It is quite an early attempt.

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, nonsense, there isn't a pin to choose between them! You haven't improved that much! (*Laughing*.) Don't be so finicky.

MUNDAY. Put back the "Jason," anyway!

MRS. MUNDAY. It's spoilt. Mary washed it with Sapolio.

MUNDAY (*decidedly*). Mary must go.

MRS. MUNDAY. If you please, Ferdinand, not to interfere. It doesn't suit me that she should go just now.

MUNDAY. I must speak to her, at any rate.

MRS. MUNDAY. What's the good? She would deny it. Leave her to me. She's an excellent servant—only a little clumsy, now and then.

MUNDAY. A *little* clumsy? Are you aware that that girl has broken to the value of about a hundred pounds in the last month? And as for the "Jason," it was not much, but I could have easily got two hundred pounds for it.

MRS. MUNDAY. I know, but—

MUNDAY. It's absurd to keep on a girl like that. We can't afford it. There won't be a thing left in the house if she stays. The walls are full of gaps.

MRS. MUNDAY (*roughly*). All the better! The house is simply choked with old Wardour Street rubbish as it is. It's far too full for comfort, or taste, and it's too large a house to be comfortable in. (*Yawning.*) I'm tired of it all—entertaining a parcel of silly, useless people, who only come to us for what they can get, and would throw us over the moment we weren't able to do anything for them. Society is a fraud—I am beginning to think it isn't worth the trouble one takes for it. I wish we could go away—go into a smaller house—

MUNDAY (*wearily*). I shouldn't mind, I am sure. Let us go and live in the country.

MRS. MUNDAY (*sharply, looking at him*). Or the seaside? Now I wonder what you would say to Hastings?

MUNDAY. Are you being arch? I fail to see—

MRS. MUNDAY (*impressively*). I saw Nevill to-day.

MUNDAY. Have you? Well?

MRS. MUNDAY. She won't come back to us.

MUNDAY. I didn't for one moment suppose she would (*hopelessly*). What is she going to do?

MRS. MUNDAY. What she said in her letter. She has let her flat and is going down to Hastings to-morrow to join that provincial company run by Marischal's sister, you know—and never means to see any of us any more. After all, I think it's for the best, Ferdinand. I'm sorry for your picture, but I, personally, shan't miss the little termagant; I was getting very tired of her airs, though she was an awfully good hand at trimming a bonnet. She was too highly strung for me—always at high pressure—we should have been continually having scenes. She's one of those women who love to live in hot water. And as for the picture—though I made great capital out of it in my talk with her—the picture does not matter, for I am sure that besotted old Verschoyle will buy it as it stands.

MUNDAY. He won't get the chance.

MRS. MUNDAY. Don't drivel, Ferdinand ! Though, I must say, I thought the idea that she was ruining your picture would fetch her, if anything would ; but no, she was as obstinate as a mule, and talked such heroics and sentimental nonsense that I lost all patience and went off without even asking her address . . . I made no doubt you had it. She is sure to have told you.

MUNDAY. I do not know it.

MRS. MUNDAY. I believe you, Ferdinand.

MUNDAY (*dryly*). Thank you.

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, you are like George Washington, and can't tell a lie—not even a society lie properly. It's as good as a play to watch you blundering down the path of falsehood. And Nevill—I never saw anybody so ingenuous ! What do you think is her reason for not coming any more ? It isn't the money bother—oh no !—she would condone that ! It's your fatal charms ! She solemnly announced to me that she was head over ears in love with you—with you, Ferdinand ! Think of that ! Don't you feel proud ? But you mustn't let her know that you know, or she'd have a fit, I verily believe.

MUNDAY (*slowly*). And you come and tell me ! A woman trusts her secret to you—and you have

the intolerable baseness to betray it to the very person she—

MRS. MUNDAY (*a little cowed*). I thought it would amuse you !

MUNDAY (*turning away from her*). You have an odd idea of amusement !

MRS. MUNDAY (*sulkily*). You are always lecturing me now, Ferdinand! . . . And I don't know about betray ! I dare wager there wasn't a soul in London didn't know her secret, as you call it, except yourself. She gave it away all along the line. She was a different person when you were in the room—her voice altered—she watched you—she hung on your words—everybody noticed it ! She was a perfect laughing-stock in our set !

MUNDAY. That's not true ! I mean, I never noticed anything of the kind !

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course you didn't. I said except you. Did you ever notice things ? But I did, at any rate, and because I said nothing all the time, she tried to make out that I was too cold-blooded to be jealous. There's your modern woman for you ! And when she confessed her love to me, with an air of mystery, in a low voice, as if the very air mustn't hear it, why, I nearly laughed in her face ! To tell *me* as news what I had known all along, I who am perfectly aware of the state of her affections !

MUNDAY (*in a hard voice*). And did you form any opinion as to mine?

MRS. MUNDAY. What do you mean?

MUNDAY (*watching her*). Supposing I, on my side, told you that I cared for her?

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course, you did care for her. You were very fond of her, as a child—and a very silly one too. I told her so. There's nothing mean about me.

MUNDAY (*pertinaciously*). But if I were to admit that I cared for her in the way that you say she cared for me—would it shock you?

MRS. MUNDAY (*lightly*). I shouldn't believe you. I should know you were only saying it to spite me. Here we are! Mind my dress! (*To the coachman.*) Back at eleven!

SCENE XXI

"AND how have you been all this time, Mr. St. Jerome?" cried Mrs. Munday, sinking into a chair near me, after she had shaken hands with Mrs. Maple-Durham, who had asked us all to a so-called literary luncheon, one frigid day in early spring. "Let me see! Is it six months that you have been abroad? It is a year since I've seen you, at any rate."

"I am afraid it is. And I didn't expect to meet you here, of all places."

That was true. I am an editor—a *littérateur*—and I make it my business to know every one not worth knowing. But although Mrs. Maple-Durham and her somewhat squalid and improper wrongs have been recently righted and glorified by a pronounced literary success, I was rather surprised to see Lydia Munday and her husband at the house of such a mammon of unrighteousness.

But Mrs. Munday soon explained it. "Poor old Mrs. Maple-Durham!" she said. "Isn't it

nice of me to come to her parties? But literature is becoming quite a passport to society, now-a-days, and it doesn't do to ignore it. I wonder who she has asked to-day in the way of lions? Here comes Cossie Davenant at any rate! . . . It is such fun cutting him. He does object so, poor wretch!"

"You're as happy and careless as ever, I see! Isn't it rather a dangerous amusement, cutting people?"

"I've cut him for months," she said gaily. "I've got quite into the way of it. He was no good."

"No good socially, you mean? I always told you so."

"Ah, but I thought it was because you——" She left the sentence unfinished, but I knew it ran "were jealous."

"There's always something wrong about a man when his own set fights shy of him," I continued.

"I dare say," said she carelessly. "I have nothing to do with him now. Oh dear, here comes my fate!" as Mrs. Maple-Durham came up and introduced a young journalist of my acquaintance, whose name is Cave. He wears the wrong sort of collar, but is otherwise a very decent sort of fellow, and no fool. I told Mrs. Munday so.

"All right! I'll suffer him gladly."

"Are you taking up literature?" I asked. There surely was some motive for this unusual tolerance.

She did not answer, but looked sphinx-like. It was her chosen attitude when she had either nothing to say, or did not choose to say it. Then we went in to luncheon. I sat on Mrs. Munday's other hand.

One never knows what trivial incident will give the impetus to conversation on these occasions. In this case it was the salt. Mrs. Bowen, on my right hand, spilt it. "Superstition—so picturesque, you know"—happened to be her latest craze, and with great ceremony she threw a large portion three times over her shoulder and well into the butler's eyes. Mrs. Munday curled her nostril—she is one of the few women I know who can accomplish that highly dramatic feat.

"Have you ever had your fortune told, May?" she asked.

"Dozens of times!" said Mrs. Bowen triumphantly. "And every time it was different. I couldn't have borne it unless. Did you ever go in for it, dear Mrs. Maple-Durham?" she asked of the novelist.

"I feared to, dear Mrs. Bowen," replied that lady portentously. "My hand frightens me sometimes. The lines seem so fateful."

"There's a simpler reason than that!" whispered Lydia to me. "Imagine that hand lying on a cushion, like a trussed chicken!"

"I don't believe in palmistry," Mrs. Bowen's husband, in his gruff transatlantic tones, was declaring. "I've got three illnesses and one shipwreck overdue, and I'm fifty-six now."

"Oh, you've still time enough," said his wife pertly. "Lydia, did you interview that woman—at the Vansittarts'—in a grotto—dressed like a witch? No, I suppose you were too sensible."

"I went in—oh yes!" said Mrs. Munday. "I don't pretend to be superior to my fellow-beings. I wanted to know when I should commit my first murder, and how many husbands I should have. I didn't tell her I had one already—I like sorceresses to have a free hand, so I left her alone to form her own conclusions first. She tugged at my thumb and nearly dislocated the joint, and announced I was born to rule! So I was! Then she said I had a false friend with blonde hair. I wonder if that was you, May? No, I don't think you positively hate me, and as for your hair——! Then there was a fair man who meant me some harm——" She looked round the table and met Davenant's eyes. "I can't believe any one wants to hurt me! . . . Well, that's about all—except a legacy, and they always throw that in for half-a-crown. Oh, and I'm to be married twice, and my second husband is to be a—I've forgotten what!"

"And which is your present husband, may I ask?" inquired the journalist infelicitously. But Lydia took no umbrage. She had evidently made up her mind, as she said, to suffer him gladly.

"Guess!" she said.

"That young man opposite you?"

"Now why should you pick him out?"

"Because he is glowering at you so."

"Quite wrong! That's Cossie Davenant, the eldest disappointment of Lord Fulham."

"And why is he glowering at you?"

"Because I won't know him."

"Why won't you?"

"Because he's a dreadful little cad. Nobody will know him. I've dropped him."

"Take care, he hears you!" I whispered.

"Let him. Who cares?" she returned sharply.
"Little weasel!"

"Weasels have a nasty bite. He'll never forgive you for calling him a cad, you had far better have said scoundrel at once—cad is unforgivable."

"Well, he is a cad, and a scoundrel too," she said, still in the same reckless tones. "He's been cheating at cards, I'm told—that's the latest!"

"You brought him up badly. I remember when one could not go to your house without treading on Cossie Davenant."

"Ah, perhaps you will come oftener now?" said

she slyly. "And what a fuss you make about it ! Isn't a woman to be allowed her little caprices ? I took him up, and I put him down, that's all. He began to bore me. I decline to be bored. Life's too short. May Bowen runs him now. She's welcome to my leavings, I'm sure . . . Mrs. Maple-Durham *has* got a strange set of people together, I must say. If this is literature ! . . . Who did you say this little man next me was, and where does he get his fearful and wonderful accent from ? "

"From Manchester, I presume—he was on the *Adventurer* for five years."

"Oh !—" She half turned.

"You had better ask him how dear Fred is ? "

"Don't mention my brother, please, to oblige me. I have a reason." She turned quite round, and smiled invitingly on Cave, whom she had hitherto somewhat neglected.

"Mr. St. Jerome tells me you come from Manchester, Mr.—" she glanced at the card that lay in front of his plate—"Cave."

"And that sets you, who are a Londoner, quite against me ? "

"Not at all ! Quite the contrary. I adore talent, and I have always understood that Manchester people were so much quicker and so much more up-to-date than Londoners."

"The Wise men came from the West, in short?"

"That's very neat, Mr. Cave. Yes, I'm a poor benighted Londoner. Tell me all about Manchester."

"Have you friends there?"

"No," with an irrepressible little shudder.

"Or investments?"

Mrs. Munday smiled very sweetly. "I see *you* come from the West. Tell me about Manchester people . . . Have you any types?"

"Plenty."

"I seem to remember hearing about a Mr.—a Mr. Fred Barker, I think it was."

"Bounder!" said Cave decidedly.

"Ah, I dare say," replied Lydia calmly. "A friend of mine had some money or something in a thing Mr. Fred Barker had to do with—"

"Sorry for him—the friend I mean. Hope he kept Barker to book? What was the thing?"

"I'm sure I forget. I was told, of course, but I've forgotten. I don't know anything about business, you know."

Cave gave her a comprehensive glance.

"Who else was in besides Fred Barker?"

"There was—I think—a Mr. Cohen," she said hesitatingly.

I must confess that at this point the conversation began to interest me so deeply, that I was

only able to spare half my intelligence to Mrs. Bowen. It was enough for her, luckily.

"By Jove!" said Cave, "Cohen? Ben Cohen, I suppose? Well, Barker's a bounder—but Cohen! You're sure you don't know any of these people?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh no, only by name and reputation."

"Reputation! They haven't an ounce of that between them. What was the name of the thing? It wasn't the 'Wallaby Proprietary Diggings, Limited,' by any chance, was it?"

"Yes, it was."

"I fancy," he said, looking at her keenly, "that you know more about this than I do."

"Tell me about it," said Lydia, quite eagerly. "Will it pay, and how much, and when?"

"Oh yes, it will pay—that is, it will pay the original syndicate, as soon as they have got the shares on the market."

"But the shareholders—"

"You know," said Cave, beginning to exercise some discretion, "I am not a business man myself—only a journalist—I had no business to talk to you about the 'Wallaby' scheme. It's no affair of mine, thank God! Have some sweets?"

Mrs. Munday declined the sweets almost rudely. She made several futile attempts to take the conversation back to Manchester, but Cave declined

to be drawn further. She sulked and said very little more till Mrs. Maple-Durham gave the signal for the ladies' departure.

"Shall I find you in your office to-morrow?" she whispered to me, as she rose. "I want to consult you about something most important." I signified yes, and the women began to file out. Cossie Davenant was nearest the door and held it open for them to pass. I watched him as his old friend Mrs. Munday went by him without a word or a glance. I declare it was intolerable! He appeared to feel it so, for he pursed up his lips, and his eyelids fluttered in a kind of spasm of rage. He looked very dangerous as he closed the door and resumed his seat, and drank down a glass of sherry.

"I saved that woman's life once, and now she won't look at me!" he remarked—I heard him distinctly—to the man next him.

Young Cave drew near me. "Who is the little devil with the fluffy hair I have been talking to?" he asked. "I didn't catch her name."

"I wonder why you call her a little devil?" I asked curiously. "She is, as you say, extremely fluffy—"

"She may be extremely fluffy, but she is a little devil for all that. My dear fellow, look at the malignant line of the mouth—I dare say people

call it a pretty mouth—at the insolent sweep of the cheek, and those clumsy inexpressive little hands! I know as well as if I were told that that woman is as hard as nails, absolutely inaltruistic, and a Philistine into the bargain. I see her in her domestic relations—I see her smacking her children—”

“She hasn’t got any!”

“Of course she hasn’t any! Doesn’t deserve ‘em, doesn’t want ‘em.”

“My dear fellow, even a journalist can’t see all this at a glance!”

“See it! I feel it! I hate her already. I have a natural antipathy to her. If I were cast on a desert island with her I should eat all the mussels myself and pelt her with the shells.”

“I’m not so sure. I think it would be the other way.”

“Is she a virago?”

“A modern woman, that’s all.”

“Oh, I see. A Philistine doubled with a New Woman. Fearful combination! And the husband—women of this kind get husbands by accident—which is he?”

“That tall dark man opposite.”

Cave looked at Ferdinand closely. “The artistic temperament plainly—poor devil—and married to her! Well, I’d as soon take a bunch of stinging

nettles to my bosom, a bundle of flails, a hair shirt——”

“Come, Cave, I think you got on very well with Mrs. Munday—on the whole. She didn’t snub you much—at least not much for *her*! I thought she was most dulcet.”

“Only when she found I hailed from Manchester. What is her interest in Manchester? She pumped me assiduously about Fred Barker, and old Cohen——”

“Her brother’s partner. She was a Miss Barker.”

“Good God! Not Barker—not the sister of that little swindling beast Fred Barker?”

“He’s her brother.”

“Then, by Jove, I’ve done it! Called him a bounder to his own sister.”

“Never mind. She has no illusions about Fred, I fancy.”

“And I told her the truth about the ‘Wallaby Proprietary Diggings.’ Half the truth, at any rate, and half the truth’s worse than no dividend to the unfortunate shareholders! I am afraid she has shares in it!”

“Not such a fool! Lydia Munday is the cleverest woman in London—in her way—and that’s her way. She was brought up on finance.”

SCENE XXII

"LADY to see you, sir!" said the office-boy, thrusting a card under my nose, as I sat at my desk, in a certain office in Fleet Street, where I spend a considerable portion of my time editing an unimportant monthly.

"Mrs. Ferdinand Munday? Show her in." I pushed away the sheets I was passing, removed a sheaf of contemporary journals from a chair, and prepared to receive the lady from the West.

She rustled in, a little out of breath, a good deal over-dressed. The office-boy was greatly impressed, as she shook hands with me, and sank into the chair I offered her, with a queenly air.

"I am interrupting you," she remarked serenely. "Are you very busy?"

"Rather. We go to press to-morrow. But I always have time for you."

"What a shockingly untidy place!" she observed with conviction. "How stuffy it is, and how it smells of gas stove, and how dreadfully

your windows want cleaning! I never was in a newspaper office before."

She sat and plumed herself, as a bird its ruffled feathers, a brilliant anomaly in this dusky den of literature.

"I'd no idea the East End was like this. People really shouldn't live in it. The dirt—the dust—the fuss and noise—oh, I had such a business to get here! I came in three omnibuses: the last put me down at Chancery Lane. Then I couldn't find two hundred and fifty-one. I asked everybody—I 'asked a p'liceman,'—I asked a sandwich man who was sitting on his sandwich—and he told me . . . Oh, I have had such adventures! There was quite a crowd near Temple Bar. I took to my elbows and used them freely. They're very pointed. An old lady turned round to me quite crossly: 'Call yourself a lady?' she said."

"And do you?"

"You mean I shouldn't have pushed! Oh, we're all alike in a crowd. It's each for himself, and the policeman for us all! . . . Then in Fetter Lane there was a man fainting! I always inquire into these things, I attended ambulance classes once. The idiots had spread him out quite flat. Now, I know you must have your head propped up quite two inches, so as to prevent the blood running to the head and causing a clot there—and I told the

policeman so. He was quite young and pink. 'Don't need you to come a-telling me!' he said. 'I know what to do.' Awfully cheeky, wasn't it?"

"And what did you say?"

"Cheeked him back, of course!"

"Mrs. Munday condescending to bandy words with the inferior classes!"

"When I'm in Fleet Street I do as Fleet Street does! I looked into his pink face and said, 'You are very young to know so much!' How the crowd cheered!"

"You had him there!"

"Hadn't I?" she laughed cordially. "Well, don't let me waste any more time in chattering—" She produced a brown-paper parcel of the fatally familiar cylindrical shape so well known and dreaded of editors, and announced portentously, "I've written a novel."

As I did not immediately reply—

"A novel is really much easier to write than I thought, at first. It's the one I began in collaboration with Cossie Davenant. But he was no good at all. I could do nothing till I got rid of him."

"Is that why you quarrelled with him?"

"Quarrelled! I never quarrel. He bored me, so I simply dropped him, that's all! . . . Well, about this great work here? I'm not going to sham modest. I *know* it's good."

"It's sure to be," I said nervously. I had a vision of a long perspective of years, during which I should be cut sedulously by Lydia Munday in consequence of the view I might be obliged to take of her novel. "What is it about?"

"People!" she said triumphantly.

"Yes, of course, people——"

"People I have known. I've got them all in—as like as I could make them. It's a *roman à clef*—the kind that's so fashionable now. It's the only thing that goes down, they say. I don't mind telling you, Mr. St. Jerome, but the fact is I don't care a bit for fame—only to make money. You know I was always material-minded." She smiled a rather sickly smile. "So I took the quickest and easiest way of making it. All the other novels I read seem awful rot to me, and yet I suppose the idiots that write them get paid for them, so why shouldn't I write a really good one, and——"

"And knock the town? No reason in the world!" I murmured mechanically.

"Here it is," she went on. "I ran it off at white heat, you know. I dare say the punctuation is a little hazy, but I can correct all that in the proof. I didn't stop to think much—just took a pen, and let it run on—these things should be struck off at once, you know—the whole point of a society novel is in its freshness—dash—go—vigour——"

"Certainly, spontaneity is a great merit."

"And of course, you see, it comes easy to me. I am *in* society—in 'the know,' as they say—these little people in the suburbs are always pining to hear anything personal about *us*."

"It is scandalous, then?"

"Isn't it just? A regular *exposé*! I just crammed in personalities—everything I could think of—it will make people sit up! I call it *Gay Gehenna*. Don't you remember my telling you about it at Swanbergh once, and you said you would help me?"

"What do you want me to do with it?" I asked helplessly.

"Do something—publish it—bring it out serially in your paper."

"But I must read it first."

"Oh, must you?" said she, in a disappointed tone.

"Must, I'm afraid. Leave it, and I will look at it."

"I couldn't think of leaving it! I dare not, it might get lost."

"I will be *most* careful."

"Couldn't you just glance over it while I am here? Do! I won't disturb you. I'll read a paper. You can see in a moment that it's all right."

"I might want to consult my assistant-editor."

"Your Mr. 'Jorkins,'" said she, smiling maliciously. "Oh, I know that dodge. Introduce me to 'Jorkins,' and I'll engage to get him on my side."

She undid the parcel and handed a very neat manuscript to me, tied up with—no, it is really unnecessary to mention it.

"It's very short," I said, scenting a means of escape.

"Short and sweet. I couldn't scrape up any more. Read some. Read it out!" she said complacently, as I turned over the leaves.

I read: "*Olivia Vereker takes a long look at herself in the glass.—They all do!—What does she see there? A pale slip of a girl—slight, slim, not precisely beautiful—the nose a shade too retroussée—tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.*" I looked across at Mrs. Munday. "*The lips are a little too full, but the eyes are large and luminous, and the whole—the whole what?—instinct with that nameless something, that intangible harmony, that mysterious power of subjugation over the other sex, which is called charm.* Not bad that, for a plain woman!"

"She's not a plain woman. Go on."

"*And yet, that small flower-like face, that delicate rounded chin, hide a decision of character, a knowledge of the world, a power of will-concentration—Is Olivia quite a nice girl?*"

"She is a modern woman," said Lydia. "Go on. Her character will develop itself presently."

"*'Have my oysters, Lord Philip,' cried Olivia—*"

"I've made them nearly all lords," she murmured complacently; "it pleases the public, and gives me no trouble."

I continued: "—handing him her plateful of the succulent bivalve. Succulent bivalve! Oh, Mrs. Munday!"

"What's wrong with the phrase? I'm sure I've seen it before!"

"So have I. Why don't you bring in nutritive esculent?"

"Oh, do go on."

I read on, the next page, and a few more, in silence, then—"Pouf!" I said, half to myself. "This will never do."

"Haven't I made it scandalous enough?" she inquired anxiously.

"Scandalous enough? Why, it makes even my hardened hair stand on end! Listen! *Sir Arthur Clinton had been implicated in one of the most notorious scandals of the day. Royalty went into the witness-box— And here, again! When Lady Susan's husband seemed about to end his political career by dying of apoplexy—Apoplexy a lingering disease!—she dutifully returned to his side, and took care that the public knew it. She attended his*

last moments, and even managed to get up a little illness with watching at his bedside. The papers, however, soon threw ridicule on that, and prophesied her re-marriage— You mean Lady Putney, who married again a month after Lord Putney died of consumption? She was an Italian."

"Yes; but I made her a Frenchwoman."

"And Mrs. Maple-Durham and her morganatic marriages?"

"Oh, she's fair game. Besides, I call her Mrs. Durham—to put people off the scent a little."

"You remind me of the ungrammatical ostrich we used to hear about at school, who sticks its head in the sand, thereby hoping to conceal the ostrich."

"I don't want particularly to hide the ostrich. That's the whole point of a *roman à clef*. People like to know who is intended."

"Yes, but they like a little touch of ambiguity now and then, as a tribute to their intelligence. You must leave something to the imagination of the public."

"The public are mostly fools!" quoted Lydia.

"Yes, but quite clever enough to see that you have put in Putney and his wife, and George St. Aubyn, and as for your domestic circle, I should say that after the publication of this work you would be a stranger to it, and that your Aunt

Elspeth would certainly cut you out of her will."

She now looked a little grave.

"Putting in yourself is all right—nobody can bring you into court for that. Olivia seems charming. And Lancelot—he is not precisely the image of Ferdinand, is he? He reminds me rather of your early friend Wilkinson."

"*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours,*" quoted Lydia in execrable French, "at least for purposes of fiction. You don't expect me to air my domestic grievances in my novel, do you? I don't go about abusing my husband, like May Bowen. I know his faults, and I make the best of them—and I don't know what right you have to assume that *I* am Olivia," she said, simpering.

I went on reading: "*When you—I beg pardon—when Olivia refuses him he leaves the room with a frightful oath!* What do you mean by a frightful oath?"

"Damn!" said she, with great distinctness.

"Take care; you'll corrupt the type-writer in the next room! Is that all? You must not be so hard on Lancelot. And then, this incident between the intoxicated organ-grinder and your heroine; it's quite impossible."

"I can only tell you it really happened."

"Then you should put 'Fact' in the margin, like the novelists of the last generation."

"You don't like realism?—but I always think one should draw as much as possible from real life."

"Yes, but the fusing power of the imagination, you know, plays a very important part in a perfect novel; it digests, it assimilates, it modifies. Novels are not slices of life taken raw. You put a novel together as you mix a pudding or compose a picture, with due regard to proportion, harmony, perspective, and all that kind of thing."

"What's the good of telling me all this," she broke in impatiently, "when I have finished the novel? Of course, I could alter it a little—a very little—"

"You would have to alter it a good deal before a publisher would look at it, my dear friend. It would ruin any publisher to publish it as it stands."

"But if it was altered?"

"There would be nothing left."

"Do you really mean that it's too strong?"

I thankfully took the line she suggested.
"Exactly! Believe me, it would never, *never* do. The public would not stand such plain speaking for a moment. It would simply ruin you socially. These personalities, these cruel epigrams, these mordant sarcasms, are like boomerangs, and return

on the sender. The best features in *Gay Gehenna* are effective, but decidedly unpopular."

"And you really are narrow enough to consider that genius ought to be hampered by these absurd personal considerations, Mr. St. Jerome? I can hardly believe it of you. I thought you were more modern. Surely genius should be allowed a free hand? Is it impossible to resist Mrs. Grundy?"

"Mrs. Grundy, yes—but not the law of libel! Take my word for it, dear Mrs. Munday, you can do nothing with this work. It is extraordinarily smart, but absolutely impossible."

"Could it be dramatized?" said she faintly.

"And then published as a prohibited play? Could you make it improper enough?" I said, laughing.

"No!" answered Mrs. Munday vehemently. "No, I will *not* stoop . . . Good-bye, Mr. St. Jerome! I suppose you know what will sell, but I don't think I can be bothered to write the milk-and-water stuff that would suit you. I can't make myself mediocre to please any one. No, I give it up! It's too disheartening! The moment a thing is really good and strong you say it won't do for the public. Poor public!"

She was dreadfully cross. The office-boy was sent for to tie up *Gay Gehenna*, a cab was called, she gave me a cold, unfriendly little hand to shake,

and left me without actually looking me in the face.

I suppose I shall not be asked to dine in Pont Street for many a long day. What a pity it is when one's friends have literary aspirations, and insist on flinging down the apple of discord before one in the shape of a novel! And it gives them away so! The cleverest woman in London, when she puts pen to paper, risks the loss of that reputation. I repented my bold statement to Cave yesterday. I could now almost believe Mrs. Munday capable of taking shares in a bubble company.

SCENE XXIII

MR. and MRS. MUNDAY sitting silent at the dinner-table, before a meagre dessert consisting of one apple, two bananas, and a plate of biscuits. The servant has just left the room.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ferdinand, you have eaten nothing !

MUNDAY. Haven't I, dear ?

MRS. MUNDAY. Hardly anything. Aren't you hungry ?

MUNDAY. No, dear.

MRS. MUNDAY. Does your head ache ?

MUNDAY. Yes, dear.

MRS. MUNDAY (*dashing down her napkin*). Ferdinand, that's the third time you have said "No, dear !" in the last minute, and in the same tone of voice too ! If you are going to be ill, I wish to goodness you would say so ! It's enough to wear one's nerves all to fiddle-strings to have you sitting opposite one, looking like a Christian

martyr, watching the wild beast that's going to eat him.

MUNDAY. That's a fine image! (*Gently.*) I don't have a headache on purpose, dear. Talk to me of something else—don't remind me of it!

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, I believe it's half fancy. A man always makes such a row if he has anything the matter with him. These headaches of yours can be nothing to mine! Poor Nevill used to cure them by laying her hands on my forehead. Dear me, poor Nevill! I wonder where she is? I wish to goodness she was back again, I know—if only as a companion for you. She might come and love you as much as she liked if she would only divert some of your blue devils from me. You are getting quite awful, Ferdinand! It isn't fair to your wife—it isn't really!

MUNDAY (*bitterly*). If I had known that I was going to be an invalid like this, I should never have presumed to marry you.

MRS. MUNDAY (*calmly*). No, I suppose you wouldn't have! . . . and you are actually making me as bad as yourself. *I've* got nerves to-night—I who never knew what a nerve was till I married you! I'm as neurotic as the best of them now. It's living in this house full of tapestries, and gloomy greeny pictures of impossible ghastly people, with an artistic fanatic . . . Oh, I could scream!

MUNDAY. What *has* happened? I never knew you like this before, Lydia.

MRS. MUNDAY. Nothing has happened—only it's a perfectly odious and hateful world; and I'm tired of struggling with it.

MUNDAY. So am I.

MRS. MUNDAY. I wish I were dead, I know.

MUNDAY. I know I do.

MRS. MUNDAY. Of course, you take care to be as depressing as you can—just when I want cheering up!

MUNDAY. Let us be cheerful!

MRS. MUNDAY. How can we be cheerful, I ask you, when you are cross, and I am ill? We simply feed each other's melancholy. We can't help it. Only the French know how to live, and have the sense to avoid this continual honeymoon. Here you and I sit, looking at each other across a long empty dinner-table, with nothing on it to eat to speak of, night after night, just because we happen to be married to each other!

MUNDAY. Does all this mean that you wish we weren't?

MRS. MUNDAY. I did not say anything of the kind. Don't take me up so, Ferdinand! I've no doubt we get along as well as most married people do after three years of married life. I'm not complaining. I don't expect to be happier than other

people. One rubs along somehow. Marriage is marriage, and one has to make the best of it.

MUNDAY. It seems a pitiful view to take of the—

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, don't begin to rhapsodize about "the most sacred of all ties," etc. I never went in for that sort of thing. Marriage is a very decent institution if it is worked properly, but it isn't rampant happiness, and you'll find that's the view most people take of it when once they come to years of discretion—been married a few years, I mean.

MUNDAY (*bitterly*). It depends on—shall I say the husband? I'm afraid I'm not much good to you?

MRS. MUNDAY. You save me from being Miss Barker at twenty-nine!

MUNDAY. The man in the street could have done that—if that's all!

MRS. MUNDAY. A less noble animal than you, you mean? (*Suddenly.*) Perhaps I don't make *you* happy? Oh, say so, say so! It only wanted that.

MUNDAY. Don't trail your coat, Lydia; I am not complaining of you.

MRS. MUNDAY (*laughing*). Oh no, not you; you always take care to be in the right. You are like the man in the French Revolution, who

always carried his head as if it were the *Saint Sacrement*!

MUNDAY. Yes, I wish I *could* take my head off and lay it aside sometimes, when it aches.

MRS. MUNDAY. What a perfectly disgusting joke! You must have a horrid mind, Ferdinand. Quite morbid! And just now too, when I'm so depressed! (*Pushing her glass across.*) Give me some more claret. I'll take brandy if you don't mind. (*Crossing her hands at the back of her head.*) Oh dear, dear, life's too dreary for anything! If only something would happen—anything! I don't expect anything nice.

MUNDAY (*hopelessly*). There is nothing nice *could* happen.

MRS. MUNDAY. There's the Academy election to-night!

MUNDAY. Well, what of it?

MRS. MUNDAY. They might elect you!

MUNDAY. So they might have any time these four years.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ah, but to-night—I've heard—Mr. Verschoyle was here to-day. He's very much in with them. He says there's a strong party for you.

MUNDAY. It's the first I've heard of it. I never make up to any of them.

MRS. MUNDAY. No, you snub them. It's just

as effective. Ferdinand, I happen to know that Verschoyle is going to the Arts club to-night. He promised me that he would come straight from there with the news, if there was any. He might be here any moment! . . . Ferdinand, don't you care?

MUNDAY. Not much. I've done very well without the R.A. so far.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ah, but you've been selling very badly lately.

MUNDAY. I sell as much as I paint.

MRS. MUNDAY. And that's hardly anything. You are getting dreadfully slack. It's awful! You have been months over that "Fiordelisa."

MUNDAY (*stubbornly*). Yes, and shall be months more.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ferdinand, to please me, you might bustle up, and get it sent home and paid for! I'm sick of the sight of it in the studio. You *do* work so slowly.

MUNDAY. Don't drive a willing horse, Lydia.

MRS. MUNDAY. I know you don't care how hard you work—you're always at it—but somehow, you have no judgment! You spend months worrying away at pictures that *I* consider finished. You never know when to leave off. It's a sign of decadence. Don't put so much work into things. Just rattle them off the way other artists do. Then

they'll look fresh. Heavens! I wish you were an impressionist. And you don't even work when you are in the studio. I have watched you. Many a time I've peeped in without your knowing, and seen you mooning away your time with your forehead against the easel——

MUNDAY (*savagely*). I'll lock the studio door in future.

MRS. MUNDAY. Nonsense! It's just a bad habit you've got into. You only want brisking up a little, and you know if you were in the Academy you could command better prices. Everybody says so. And it would do you good every way. What you want is a fillip.

MUNDAY (*getting up and striding about*). I want no fillip—I only want to be let alone, and paint my pictures my own way. Please don't worry me. I allow you to live your own life; allow me to live mine. I was an artist before I married you, and an artist I mean to be——

MRS. MUNDAY. You have never been anything else. I don't flatter myself you ever put me first.

MUNDAY (*hotly*). On the contrary, I have given up everything to you, except my artistic independence. You want that now as well. You want to make my life not worth having! You want to degrade me, to drive me to do things against my conscience, for the sake of a wretched hundred

pounds or so extra. I won't do it! I will *not* paint pot-boilers to please you, or spoil my work by sending it out before it is finished! You are doing your best to ruin me—my art—and you shall not do it! You shall not, I say!

MRS. MUNDAY. Heavens, Ferdinand, what a tornado! And all because I suggested your pulling yourself together a little. Money happens to be a little tight with us just now. Of course *you* don't notice—you simply hand over your cheques to me as you get them—and very few at that! I have all the bother and worry——

MUNDAY. It was your own wish. You undertook to run the house.

MRS. MUNDAY (*determinedly*). Very well, I'll run it. Do sit down and subside . . . Talking of money, Lucy was here to-day, and she says Aunt Elspeth thinks she's going to die.

MUNDAY. Poor old lady!

MRS. MUNDAY. Oh, it's not the first time. But she really is rather shaky. Seventy-eight. But Lucy was always an alarmist. However, I mean to look her up and see that she doesn't play the fool. I was always her favourite niece, and it wouldn't do to let her money slip through our fingers.

MUNDAY. We don't want her money.

MRS. MUNDAY. Everybody wants money, and

intrigues for it, and these old women want looking after. They are apt to be got at by interested people. Lucy says she gave five hundred to a Home for Inebriates the other day. Isn't it shameful?

MUNDAY. She has a perfect right to do as she likes with her own money.

MRS. MUNDAY. Not when she has relations. It properly belongs to them. However, I managed to get her to give me that old miniature she had of grandfather, set in diamonds, the other day. It's worth quite eighty-five pounds.

MUNDAY. But, my dear Lydia, ought——?

MRS. MUNDAY. She was going to leave it me in her will, anyhow. It was just as well to make sure. I'll get as much out of her as I can that way. She's such a dangerous old woman, you know—always altering her will. One never knows where to have her. She's got the idea into her head now. I must look after her. Lucy and I saw the last, when she gave us her keys once to get something out. She's left everything equally to me and Lucy and Fred and Toosie.

MUNDAY. She ought to leave extra to Toosie, and set her up as an heiress. She's so plain, poor little thing! You and Lucy have run away with all the looks of the family.

MRS. MUNDAY. I don't consider Lucy pretty!

But, Ferdinand, don't you call it excessively unfair to leave it so equally? Fred is sure to drop it in some ridiculous scheme or other—Fred is an idiot, a speculator—and as for Lucy, she has only to lift her little finger and she can marry Woffle, who is sure to be Lord Chancellor, while I—oh, well, *I'm* out of it, I've no chance—I'm married and done for.

MUNDAY (*bitterly*). You mean that you are not an improving property. You have sunk your value in marrying an artist—a pauper——

MRS. MUNDAY. I didn't mean that quite . . . Though, Ferdinand, you really don't make the best of things, you *are* so slipshod about money matters. Has Wigan ever sent his cheque for the difference in that exchange? If he did, you never gave it me?

MUNDAY. It was only thirteen pounds. I paid the water rate with it. You were out, and they seemed to be clamouring for it.

MRS. MUNDAY (*relieved*). Oh, did you? That's all right . . . And when is Vyvyan going to pay you for "The Knight of the Bloody Sleave"?

MUNDAY. When he likes.

MRS. MUNDAY. Hurry him up!

MUNDAY. I shall let him take his time. He let me take mine.

MRS. MUNDAY. I shall write to him.

MUNDAY. Lydia, I forbid you!

MRS. MUNDAY. A modern husband forbid a modern wife anything!

MUNDAY. I forbid you to interfere in my affairs.

MRS. MUNDAY. Ferdinand, what a bear you are growing! Well, I'll give him a fortnight more. And Verschoyle—aren't you going to let him have Nevill?

MUNDAY (*starting*). You mean the "Fiammetta"?

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes.

MUNDAY. It isn't finished.

MRS. MUNDAY. Finish it.

MUNDAY. I can't without the model I began it from.

MRS. MUNDAY. Yes, you can—you can do it very well without that girl. It's a mere fad of yours. All models are interchangeable. And if you did get her back, I don't suppose she would be in the least like what she was. Two years scrambling about the Continent in the company of heaven knows who, would age and draggle any woman. She'll have lost her Madonna face by this time. I don't suppose you'd know her if you saw her.

MUNDAY (*roughly*). What do you mean? In the company of whom?

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, she was last seen at Vienna with that clever old villain Festugères.

MUNDAY. She's his pupil.

MRS. MUNDAY. Well, we all know what that means! Look at her with you! A girl like that—ready to fall into the arms of the first man that made love to her. If she was respectable—(*A bell rings*)—she would let people know where she is. You may take my word for it, she has gone to the bad long ago.

MUNDAY (*white with passion*). Lydia! Good God—you are my wife—or—

Enter MR. VERSCHOYLE, followed by an Italian model.

VERSCHOYLE. My dear fellow! I congratulate you! Fork out your guinea for this gentleman here (*pointing to the model*). He started first—but didn't know his way here. You're elected to the Academy by a majority of twenty votes.

MUNDAY. D——n the Academy!

SCENE XXIV

ONE afternoon, a fortnight after this conversation, Mrs. Munday rang the bell of 56, Bedford Square, and waited on the steps in a brown study. The old butler, who had known her since she was a child, opened the door. His countenance exhibited a certain solemnity. Mrs. Munday thrust a brown-paper package into his hand without looking at him, saying decidedly, "Tell the cook to boil it thoroughly—for two hours at least—before she sends it up to my aunt."

"Ma'am—" he began, but she pushed past him, and past the frightened little buttony boy who stood dubiously in the passage.

"Where's Miss Lucy? Oh, here you are!" as her sister came forward from an inner room.

"Come in here," said Lucy, with an air of quiet authority.

"Why not the study?"

"There are—people there."

"Well, I don't mind people. What people? Look here, I've brought some food—a special preparation for Aunt Elspeth. You none of you seem to have the least idea of taking care of her. I'm going up to her presently, but I wanted to see you first, Lucy. Look here, you can have that green chiné silk dress of mine for two pounds—dirt cheap, simply!"

"I don't want it—now," replied Lucy, looking at her coldly.

"Don't be a fool! It's a bargain, I tell you. You can let it out in the waist, and shorten the skirt, and it will just carry you nicely through the summer . . . How fearfully dark it is here! Pull up the blinds, can't you?"

"Don't," said Lucy, arresting her.

"Oh, very well, I don't care. I can only stay a few minutes. I'm dead tired. I've been out since ten o'clock seeing people in the City. But I wasn't going to disappoint Aunt Elspeth. She would think me so unkind. She's expecting me, isn't she?"

"Hardly," said Lucy.

"Oh yes, she is, for I told her I'd come to-day some time, and I always keep my word. We are going to do business together."

"Are you?" said Lucy.

"Yes, she gets so muddled about money, poor

old thing, and I have got such a clear head. I'm putting her accounts beautifully straight for her. The family ought to be grateful to me. Here, let me go up to her!" She rose. "I haven't time to waste chattering to you."

Lucy laid her hand on the handle of the door.

"Lucy, how odd you are! You don't seem to want me to go up to Aunt Elspeth? Let me go, I say! You cannot pretend to want to keep me from seeing my own aunt."

"You can see her," said Lucy, removing her hand from the handle. "Oh yes—but it will give you a shock, I warn you!"

"What! Is Aunt Elspeth worse?"

"She's dead!" said Lucy.

* * * * *

Mrs. Munday sat down suddenly.

"Dead! Aunt Elspeth! You wicked girl, Lucy! You horrid girl! How dare you! How dared you play such a trick on me——!"

She went on in this strain, but Lucy, the timid, stood beside her unabashed. There was a kind of quiet dignity about her, as of a young avenging deity, when, having allowed Lydia to exhaust her expressions of anger and amazement, she began to speak—

"Dear Aunt Elspeth died last night, or rather, early this morning. We sent round to tell you—

but I suppose you were out. It was quite a sudden attack. Yesterday the doctor hinted there was danger. We telegraphed for Fred. She had asked for him. He's here now . . . For goodness' sake, Lydia, don't pretend you care! You needn't cry—nobody expects it of you! You are only mad because Aunt Elspeth has died before you had time to make her alter her will. That's what you came for, with your patent soup and your sympathy. You never bothered to come near her till she got ill, and then you came every other day. Oh, I knew—we all knew—don't dare to pretend to be sorry—we should despise you for it—we won't allow it for a moment. Toosie has cried ever since. She loved Aunt Elspeth. So did I. I'd cry if I had time. I haven't. I must go to mother. Mother is ill. If you want to know anything more you must ask Fred . . . Fred, here's Lydia. Talk to her——"

She left the room. Mrs. Munday raised her head as her brother slouched in.

"Cheer up, old girl! Don't spoil your pretty eyes! You've come to a house of mourning, eh? Didn't expect the old lady would jack up quite so soon, did you? 'In the midst of life we are in death,' etc. I've come down to arrange matters. I say, Lyd——"

"What?"

"You've mulled it a bit, haven't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, we all twigged your little game—you wanted to get yourself well left—came and palavered the old lady—everybody noticed it—Lucy's wild with you about it, I can tell you. Straight girl, Lucy! Oh, it was a neat little plan enough, I don't blame you, but you weren't sharp enough to pull it off. You've got to get up early if you want to get the better of Death."

"Fred, you are an utter brute! . . . Poor old aunt!"

"Lord, Lyd, what an actress you are! You can actually manage to squeeze out a tear or two! Brava! brava! Don't waste 'em on me, keep 'em for the funeral."

"I'm not crying!" said she roughly, as a schoolboy denies his tears when taunted by a companion. "Look here, Fred, I want to speak to you. Fred, you are killing me, do you know, Fred!" The tears started to her eyes, but she did not allow them to fall.

"Am I, now; how?"

"Fred, it's awfully bad; you don't know what a fearful position I'm in. Those shares? Tell me something! I'm awfully hard up. It will kill me! Duns and bills and things keep coming, and I don't know where to turn. I'm at my wits'

end. It's wearing me out. Something awful will happen! I shall be disgraced—I really shall—if something doesn't turn up! You don't know how bad it is."

"Well, this *is* news. I'd no idea you were so hard up! You've managed to put a very good face on it, so far, I must say. Balls and parties, carriages, Paris dresses—"

"Because I'm not a fool, Fred. I'm a plucky woman, and I've contrived—I've struggled—I've fought, but the time's coming when I shan't be able to hide it any longer; I see the end of it all—disgrace—and I—I've always given myself such airs. People will laugh . . . I've told no one, but it's killing me!"

"I can't help it, can I?"

"Yes, Fred, it's you that are responsible! I trusted you, you persuaded me, you know you did! . . . It's your doing, you are responsible entirely. It's on your head, Fred."

"Damn! Don't talk such rot! It was a speculation like another."

"But, Fred, you don't mean——?" she looked anxiously in his face. "Good God, Fred, is it as bad as that? I met a man who knew Cohen at lunch one day, and he frightened me, but I still believed you could pull it through. Oh, Fred, I believed in you!"

"I hardly believe in myself," said Fred sulkily.
"Cohen has had me over this, I can tell you."

"But, Fred—Fred, do you mean——?"

"I mean . . . Look here, it's like this! When I first came and asked you to go into the syndicate we were making to run the 'Wallaby Proprietary,' I really did believe in it. I don't say the thing wasn't rotten—of course it was, these things mostly are—but I thought you and I could get out before it burst up. Well, we didn't. There, that's speaking plainly, isn't it?"

"Yes, now you can speak plainly enough," said she bitterly. "Why did you let me into a rotten thing?"

"I never told you it was sound, did I?"

"You certainly did."

"Oh no, you're mistaken. All I said was, you could get out of it in good time, and at a good premium. Just as old Cohen and his lot—his gang have."

"And as *you* have, I suppose."

"Eh? Who told you I had?"

"Have you?"

"Well, you see," said Fred, hesitating, "I did manage to get rid of some part of my holding—only a part, you know, not the whole by long chalks—at a pretty good figure."

"And what about me?" she wailed.

"Well, you see," said Fred, continuing to use the deprecatory formula, "it was a touch-and-go thing. These things are a rush, always. You part with ten thousand, and then five minutes after, the market's as dull as a duck-pond, and you can't get a share off for love or money."

"So you saved yourself, like the selfish beast that you are, and left me in the lurch? You cheat!—you——"

"Hold on, Lyd! Don't go slanging me like that! I tell you I'm left in myself—to some extent. Cohen's done me, and I don't slang him. On the contrary, I ask him to champagne lunches—Heidsieck *vin brut*, you know—Cohen likes it dry—best of everything—and next time I'll take precious good care to leave *him* out in the cold."

"Don't drivel me about what you'll do to Cohen. Tell me plainly—is my ten thousand pounds absolutely gone and lost?"

"Well," said Fred, "your shares are not exactly what we call a realizable asset." He sniggered nervously.

She made a step forward, and the look on her face alarmed him. "Look here, Fred, I won't go on being cheated like this. Tell me what you and your friends have done with my fortune that I gave them at your bidding?"

"Ask old Cohen."

"Fred——"

"I say, Lyd, you're awfully simple for a clever woman! Did you ever hear of salting a mine? Well, your ten thousand pounds have been in the salt-cellar. Did you ever hear of a sprat to catch a herring? Well, your money was that sprat—your money and mine."

"And that devil Cohen has made a fortune over it?"

"Hardly, but he's netted a neat thing. If ever I——"

"Surely he could be made to recoup?"

"Could he? What a lark it would be to try! Have you the money, though? You would have to spend a little fortune, and get up early in the morning, to beat Cohen. He's beaten *me* . . . No, no, Lyd, give it up and think of something else . . . What's the matter now?"

"Don't you see I'm done—ruined!" She staggered and turned quite white.

Fred was a little frightened.

"Don't go and faint, for heaven's sake! It's not like you. Pull yourself together, and think of a way out of this."

"I can't—I can't. I wish I was dead."

"No, you don't. Don't give way like a school-girl." He stretched out a clumsy hand and laid it on her shoulder. She shook it off fiercely.

"Look here, you're not the woman I take you for if you haven't some card or other up your sleeve. What about mother?"

"I'd die sooner than tell her. Besides, she's got nothing."

"Then Lucy? She doesn't live up to her allowance, I'll be bound. Tell her everything and ask her to help you."

"Confide in a woman! Never! I never did, and I never will."

"Well, then your husband? He's the proper person."

"Fred, you know Ferdinand has nothing but what he makes, and he has been ill this year."

"I could perhaps lend you a couple of hundred—three hundred—on some sort of security, if that would help you to go on."

"A mere drop in the ocean!"

"By Jove! You must have been going it! Why, Annabel and I have been pulling in for some time past. We are none so well off, I can tell you."

"Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad you feel it! I'm glad you and your dowdy wife suffer too."

"You little devil!"

"Yes. I am! I am! You've made me one! I hate you, Fred. I hate every one. I hate the whole world! I haven't a single friend in it! I

wish—I wish I could insure all your lives, and then poison you after, like——”

“You’ll end in the dock, Lyd, if you go on like this! But talking of friends, you’ve always been a pretty good flirt, I dare say you know any amount of fellows who would only be too glad to fork out for you. What’s the good of being pretty? Work ‘em, I say! What has become of that aristocratic fellow Davenant, who was always hanging about? Now’s his time.”

Mrs. Munday rose. “Open the door, if you please, and send for a hansom. I’m not going to stay here to be insulted. I’m sorry I’ve got a low, coarse brute for my brother. No, I won’t be lent anything! I’d rather starve . . . Let me pass, please . . . Is there a cab there?”

“Where are you going?” asked he, a little appalled by her vehemence.

“Oh, I don’t know . . . To the river, I think.”

“Better try the Jews first!” said Fred Barker mockingly, as she dashed past him.

“It’s pretty nearly the same thing.” She got into the hansom, and speaking huskily through the trap-door, gave the address of a well-known office in the City.

SCENE XXV

"WOULD you like to come to my box for the first night at the Pall Mall Theatre to-morrow?" said Mrs. Bowen to Cossie Davenant, as they stood together in the crush at Mrs. Malory's ball. It was early in the evening and everybody was arriving.

"I should like it of all things. Who is this new woman who is to play the title part in *The Doctor's Wife?*"

"Miss Ilma Loraine? I don't know. Calder-Marston discovered her somewhere, picked her out of the provinces I believe. He thinks her very good. Poingdestre wrote the play for her. All I know about it is that it's intensely modern. We shall see! . . . Good heavens! Look at Lydia Munday!"

"I never look at Lydia Munday. She has ceased to interest me."

"I assure you she looks positively ghastly. Is it her black dress, I wonder? Black makes some

people look awful. She's in mourning for an aunt, I believe. I haven't seen her anywhere for quite six weeks."

"I knew she would be here to-night," said Cossie Davenant, with a sinister twist of his lip.

"How did you know? Because St. Jerome's here? Ah, he's very faithful, poor old fellow—clings to the sinking ship."

Cossie looked at her.

"I'm not spiteful—not a bit!" said she uneasily. "But you can't deny that Lydia is a little gone off—completely, one might say. I never saw a woman so changed. She's hardly pretty now."

"Was she ever?"

"Well, people said so. You thought so—come!"

"In my salad days," replied Cossie.

"How Lydia would have been down on you for that common-place! . . . Well," she continued, surveying Mrs. Munday through her *pince-nez*, "if I looked as ill as that, I'd stop at home. But I dare say she had her reasons for wanting to come."

It was Mrs. Hugo Malory's ball—her great ball—the ball of the season—that she gave every year for the benefit of two plain nieces, and to which every one was glad to get an invitation.

"And there's Ferdinand Munday! He looks ill and worried too. Poor Ferdinand! I am devoted to him, you know. Don't you like him?"

"He's too good for that infernal woman, at any rate," muttered Cossie unwillingly.

"How you hate her, Cossie! What has she done to you? Only got bored with you? She gets bored with people very easily. Oh, don't look savage! You had your turn like everybody else. I wonder Ferdinand doesn't flirt in self-defence. But there was never anybody but that Miss France, and it was she, more than he, I think. I must say Lydia was very patient about that—no particular merit in her, though, for I believe she's too cold-blooded to be jealous. I am sure I should have been, with such a handsome husband. But there was always something froggy about Lydia, I think—something not quite human."

"I fancy she's human enough," he said, "if only one knows where to take her."

"I sometimes think if she had had a child, it would have softened her," continued Mrs. Bowen; "and she never cries, you know. But at their last evening-party—they haven't given one for ages—she looked as if she wished us all away, I can tell you. Something was wrong. The party wasn't at all a success. Very shabby—and their parties used to be so good. And last time I called there was a rude woman in the hall declaring she wouldn't go away unless she was paid! And my husband met Lydia quite plainly dressed in a brown veil

right away down in the City! Are they hard up, do you think? Pulling in? I've suspected it for a long time. One notices little things; and Lydia and I have the same dressmaker—Madame Cromer—and Cromer is always hinting that there's something. Though Lydia prides herself on being such a capital manager, even she can't create money. They have that enormous house to keep up, and Lydia has awfully expensive habits. She was an heiress, I believe. They couldn't live in that style on pictures. I must get my husband to go and buy a picture. I like Ferdinand. I should hate to see him *look* poor—not dressed well. He does dress so well—so unlike most artists!"

"That handsome dress of Mrs. Munday's doesn't look much like poverty!" sneered the young man.

"My dear Cossie, that proves nothing! The last thing a woman saves off is her own back. She would sooner save off her friends."

"Has she any friends?"

"Yes, but they are mostly his. People are beginning to fight shy of her and her tongue. It takes the skin off one like a tiger's. She can't help it. It's her nature. Look how unkind she used to be to you, even!"

"Not always."

"What do you mean? . . . You very conceited boy!"

"That sentence shows you understand what I mean," said Cossie.

"Tell me, now, was there ever anything in it—what people said? Oh, you know I'm privileged; I always say what I like; no one ever dreams of being offended with me and my silly speeches! Tell me, was there?"

"Was there what?"

"Anything—decided? I was told there was."

"I shall not tell you."

"That's as good as telling me."

"Why do you want to know?" said he indulgently.

"I confess I should like to know something—not necessarily for publication—about Lydia. It gives one such a pull. Lydia always gets the best of me somehow, though I don't suppose she's any cleverer than I am, really. It's hateful. I should like to have something to smite her with." She leaned across to him, with a pathetically beautiful expression of appeal on her face.

Cossie looked at her. "Oh, you'll have the best of it in future, I can tell you."

"Is it—is there going to be a row—a scandal?" she exclaimed, her face lighting up. "Tell me, I am so bored just now. Do you know anything, you delightful person? Is it about Miss France?"

"Come and dance?" he asked shortly, and in

joyful anticipation of gossip to come she rose obediently and took his arm back to the ball-room.

* * * * *

"I shall be ready to go very soon, Ferdinand, if you don't mind," Mrs. Munday was saying to her husband, in another part of the room. "I'm tired. I only wanted to show myself! Send Mr. St. Jerome to me if you can find him, and come back for me in twenty minutes."

She sank wearily into a *causeuse*, half shaded by the inevitable palm of ball-rooms, and lit by a pink-flushed Chinese lantern. She yawned desperately and half closed her eyes. Presently the two couples who shared the little nook drifted out, and left her alone. Then she sat up and furtively put her hand in her pocket, drawing thence a square sheet of blue letter-paper which she scanned with the air of one who had read it already.

"A week! Only a week! They only give me a week; that's seven days; and then—then—oh, the deluge!" She groaned, and half rose. Cossie Davenant appeared in the doorway. The sheet of paper fell from her hand, and she sat down again helplessly.

"Yes, you had better stop, Mrs. Munday."

"What for?"

"I want to speak to you. Sit down, please!"

"You give your orders?"

"Please sit down. I am not going to ask you for a dance. I want to speak to you—on business."

"I will speak to you—on business!" She laid a stress on the last word. There was a pause, in which he stood and looked down on her.

"Look here," said he, working himself up, "I don't mean to stand this kind of thing any longer."

"What kind of thing?"

"The kind of thing you are doing. You are making society a perfect hell to me!"

"You have done that for yourself."

"You are making me ridiculous."

"Is that in my power?"

"All my friends are telling me of it, that you go about abusing me, and spreading the vilest slanders against me. I don't choose to be snubbed by you—*you*! I won't bear it! I will stop your mouth!"

"How?"

"In the usual way. I have a story to tell, and by Jove, I'll tell it, unless——"

Mrs. Munday's nonchalant pose grew if possible more nonchalant. She fixed unwavering eyes, rimmed round as they were with the bistred shades of sleeplessness and ill-health, on his flushed face. "Unless I——? How very interesting! I never was blackmailed before! It's quite a new sensation! Do you want money? For if so, I'm afraid I am unable at present to——"

"Confound it all! Do you take me for a cad?"

"I'm afraid I do."

"I want to be revenged—to be revenged on you; do you understand?"

"Revenge! How delightful to hear the expression used in real life! I've only heard it up to now on the stage of the Adelphi!"

"You'll find I'm serious."

"I find you delightfully pompous, so far," she said, raising her *pince-nez*. "You are as good as a play, as I have just told you. Go on; what will you do to me?"

"I will tell every one——"

"Tell every one what? Be more explicit! That you had the impertinence to make love to me, and that I had to snub you? And how I nearly had to carry you whimpering along the rocks at Swanbergh? . . . Oh, it's a pretty story! I felt then I could never speak to you again. I detest and despise cowards!"

"You—you could bear to speak to me once," he stuttered, almost choking with rage.

"I wonder how I came to do it."

"You even wrote to me."

"Did I really?"

"I kept the letters."

"How childish of you!"

"I counted them this morning ; there are eleven of them !"

"Are there indeed ?"

"Would you like everybody to read them ?"

"I have not the slightest objection. I have not a notion what was in them, but I don't fancy it would corrupt anybody."

Though she spoke with infinite assurance, her brow furrowed ; she appeared to be questioning her memory . . . From that moment she lost her advantage, and Davenant, becoming master of himself and of the situation, assumed the ease of the judicial manner. "A woman," he said, "asked me just now, if all they say about you and me was true. I did not tell her that you came to my rooms, but I might—might I not ?"

"You told me your sisters were there," she said hastily.

"But they weren't ; they had left half-an-hour before. They were not told you were coming, or they would have stayed."

"You had no right to let me come in !"

"You did not say so at the time. You were content that they should be absent. If I recollect, you stayed—you fluttered about, and looked at things, and——"

"And what ?"

"And—nothing ! But still you were a little anxious

about it, and you sent me a telegram. '*Mrs. Maple-Durham had tea with you to-day—Munday.*' Here it is! Why should you trouble to tell me who was at tea in my rooms? I was up to it of course, and I wrote you a letter and added a postscript to this effect—'*The Maple-Durham's puce gown—oh, call it puce, not dirty—didn't harmonize well with my flame-coloured hangings to-day, did it?*' Here is your reply! Shall I read it? '*That was very wily of you, Cossie. I showed your letter to Ferdinand. Mrs. Maple-Durham's puce gown quite settled his doubts. You see, he happened to ask me when I came home who was there, and I had to invent Mrs. Maple-Durham on the spur of the moment.*' That sounds rather odd, doesn't it?"

"You kept that letter? You carry it about with you?"

"That, and ten others! The whole bundle takes very little room. I vowed ever since that lunch at Mrs. Maple-Durham's, when you sat opposite me and abused me to St. Jerome, that next time I came across you, I would make you sorry for the way you have behaved."

"There is nothing particularly compromising in going to the rooms of a boy like you."

"Then why send telegrams about it? And listen to this, *à propos* of that little Fourth of June

escapade of ours!—‘*How well you remember poetry! Orsino’s speech suits the occasion exactly. I see I can trust you. If people only knew how to hold their tongues, they would get far more of their own way.*’”

“What is Orsino’s speech?”

“I swear,
To dedicate my cunning and my strength,
My silence, and whatever else is mine,
To thy commands.”

He emphasized the word “silence.”

“I am not responsible for what a man in Shakespeare says.”

“No, but you were good enough to apply it to your own case. Shall I read any more?”

“It’s nothing—it’s nothing!” she cried vehemently. “What a mountain out of a molehill! Nobody would think anything of it—as society is now.”

“We will see what Mrs. Bowen says to it. It will amuse her, at any rate.”

“Let me have the letter to look at,” said she suddenly.

“I expected you to ask that!” he answered gravely, handing the letter to her. She examined it, carefully holding it up to the light of the Chinese lantern over her head . . . Her fingers closed on it to tear it up—

"Do, by all means," he said. "It's only a copy."

Uttering an ugly cry of rage she crumpled it up and flung it in his face. It fell to the ground beside them, and Cossie asked, insolently—

"Shall I leave it there—for the housemaids to find? They won't know it's a copy. It might interest Mrs. Malory, who seems to believe in you——"

"Cossie!" she said imploringly.

"Oh yes, Cossie now——"

"Don't offer me up as a sacrifice to May Bowen. She hates me."

"I am quite aware of that. She would be delighted to hear of our travelling down to Swanbergh together last summer."

"We didn't!"

"We didn't actually, because that fellow St. Jerome got into the way. But I met you at the other end. And we corresponded about it, and made arrangements about hotels."

"You went to a different one."

"That hardly appears from the letter. Yes, you have been most imprudent, Mrs. Munday. You should have thought twice before treating me as you have done. And I've another charming letter at home in answer to one I wrote to you asking you to call me by my Christian name—and other privileges——"

"You are a cad ! I was warned against you. I see they were right."

"They?" said he contemptuously. "St. Jerome, I suppose. You abused me to him. Well, I'll make you sorry you ever called me names."

"What am I to do ?"

"That is no concern of mine."

"Will you come and see me? Shall we let by-gones be by-gones?"

He shook his head.

"What do you mean to do? Show those letters to my husband?"

He sneered. "Your husband—good man—what are you thinking of? I shall show them to the people whose opinion you really care about, the people whom you are afraid of, who can make you feel—*you* feel—if you can! Your husband! Do you think I don't know all about your relations with your husband? You couldn't disillusion him if you tried, he knows you! So do I! So will everybody soon. There he is! Go to him, and get him to take care of you."

She rose, and walking unsteadily up to her husband, "Ferdinand, take me home!" she cried.

* * * *

Davenant stooped to pick up the crumpled copy of the letter which had rolled under the seat. In so doing he recovered the blue paper

which Mrs. Munday had dropped just before. He read it—

“‘Two hundred and two, Billiter Court,’ I know those fellows. ‘Madame Cromer’s advance’—The friendly dressmaker, by Jove!—‘We beg to inform you on behalf of our client, Madame Cromer, that your three months’ bill for £850 10s. 6d.’—That’s stiff!—‘became due and payable on the 10th inst., and that our client does not feel inclined to renew the same. We are accordingly instructed to call upon you for immediate payment of the aforesaid sum of £850 10s. 6d., failing which we are instructed to proceed against you without further notice. We also beg to remind you that our client has a bill of sale on your furniture. We are, faithfully yours, LEVI & SLUDGE.’”

He carefully folded up the letter with the lawyers’ address outside, and walking slowly into the cloak-room, where Munday was putting on his coat, gave it to him, saying—“Mrs. Munday dropped this, I think.”

Munday acknowledged the service by a slight nod, and put the paper in his pocket without looking at it.

SCENE XXVI

THE moonlight poured full on to Lydia Munday's face, as she lay in bed. She had forgotten to close the window-curtains. Presently she sat up, her eyes dilated, her hands outstretched, in the agony of dreaming.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Please! No—I—it is a shame! What am I to do? You give me no time. Next Tuesday! Next *Tuesday!* I can't possibly do it by then . . . Why, it's absurd—perfectly absurd! I never meant . . . Borrow of Cossie? Oh no! Madame Cromer, you ought to be ashamed! . . . Give them back—give them back, Cossie! It's a caddish thing to keep a woman's letters . . . Ferdinand is a gentleman. Don't look at them—not intended . . . "

The door of the room, which she had left ajar, creaked a little on its hinges. She shrieked agonizedly—

"Oh no—no—you can't come in! Don't let

them in, Céleste! Say I'm out . . . say I'm dressing . . . great, rough, coarse men! The law . . . must you? That—and that? Oh no, not everything—not that cabinet—that is my husband's—you can't take that! I say you can't. Fred! Fred! Stop them! They have no right. Don't stand there laughing, Madame Cromer! Fred, don't laugh! Oh, Fred, you beast, it's your fault! You've ruined me. Where's that money? Answer me! Answer me! Speak, can't you?"

"Dear, I can't speak till you take your fingers off my throat." It was her husband's voice. "Don't you know you are nearly throttling me!"

"They're in, they're in!" she screamed, still clutching him frantically. "The broker's men—horrible creatures. Send them away! . . . Don't laugh, it's awful! I can't pay, and I can't get the letters back. I'm ruined . . . Cossie!"

"Wake up, dear, it is I—Ferdinand. What's all this about broker's men and Fred and Cossie and letters?"

"He has no right to keep them. There's nothing in them, nothing, I assure you——"

"No, dear, no, I'm sure there's nothing in them." He turned up the electric light, and, coming back, put his arm round her protectingly. She stared wildly about the room over his shoulder.

"Have they gone then? Gone—really gone? Why, it's you, Ferdinand! What have I been saying?"

"You have been talking in your sleep. You shouldn't go to sleep with the moonlight full on your face. You left your door open, and I was sitting up reading in the studio, and I heard you—"

"Talking out loud? I often do," she said stolidly. "It means nothing."

"You said some uncommonly odd things, I can tell you."

"What did I say? What did I talk about?" she asked anxiously, shaking off his arm.

"Oh—sleepy nonsense—Fred and furniture—you seemed to fancy you were being sold up—"

"What else?"

"Oh, your dressmaker—and a letter. Is it by any chance a letter which Davenant handed to me to-night as I was putting on my coat? He said you had dropped it. Wait—" he began to feel in his pockets. Mrs. Munday's eyes grew round with terror—she seized his hand—

"Oh, Ferdinand, dear Ferdinand, I can explain it all. I really can. It's only a foolish letter of mine—I can explain—"

"You can save yourself the trouble," replied her

husband coldly. "I haven't looked at the letter even. There it is, just as he gave it to me!"

She snatched it from his hand and hid it under the pillow. The lawyers' address was distinctly visible. He frowned and took his arm away from her shoulder.

"Lydia!" he said gravely.

"What?" She turned away her eyes.

"You know I don't pretend to influence your actions, or interfere in your affairs in any way—but if I can help you at all? Surely that was a lawyer's letter!"

"No; it isn't—is it?" She dragged the letter violently from under the pillow, glanced at it and screamed out, "That one! And he has read it! Then I am done—oh, I'm done——"

"Hush! hush! Who has read it?"

"Cossie—Cossie Davenant—that means all the world. Take it! Read it! Perhaps you can help me!"

She thrust it into his hand, and turning round hid her face in the pillow, while he sat on the edge of the bed and read the letter through. Then he touched his wife gently on the shoulder.

"Turn round and explain this to me. This woman—Madame Cromer—threatens an execution on your furniture?"

"Yes, Ferdinand."

"Unless you pay her by next Tuesday?"

"Yes, Ferdinand."

"You are in debt to her, for clothes—to this amount?"

"No, no, Ferdinand, not clothes, not all clothes—she lent me money—it all went down in the bill, don't you see?"

"Why don't you pay her? You can afford to, I suppose?"

"That's just it. I can't."

"You have an income of—let me see——"

"Don't count up, Ferdinand, you worry me. I had."

"You are insolvent?"

"Yes. That's what Fred has done. Fred has ruined me—the wretch—the beast——"

"Don't get excited, but tell me what Fred has done."

"Go and open that drawer of my escritoire. There are the keys on the dressing-table."

Munday crossed the room, opened a drawer according to her directions, and took out sheaves of papers.

"Read them," she said wearily.

He sat down with his back to her. She propped her chin on her hand and watched him as he read

them carefully. There were bills unreceipted, the applications of tradesmen in all tones and styles—formal reminders, requests for payment, importunate applications for money, appeals, threats, and finally the cold, inexorable demands of lawyers—all the pitiless artillery which plays incessantly upon the insolvent.

"You see how it is," she said at last, when he rose and came back to her.

"I see that you have got yourself into the devil's own mess. I had no idea of this. I ought to have looked after you. Tell me, when did this all begin? About two years ago, I gather?"

"Yes, soon after we were married—when Fred came to see me, and he told me all about the 'Wallaby Proprietary Diggings.' I was all right till I joined that hateful syndicate of Fred's. One always believed in Fred, he's so cocksure! And I gave them ten thousand like a fool! You saw all that? and then they allotted me shares in the company they formed—and my shares went down. And you know we were living on rather an expensive scale just then—carriage, dinners, and parties—and I had to dress, and keep up appearances, for your sake, Ferdinand——"

He made an impatient gesture.

"Oh yes, I had to. It wasn't extravagance—it

was business. People don't buy your pictures unless you swagger and are the fashion, and we *were* the fashion, thanks to me! But one can't swagger on nothing, and I began to feel pinched for money. I couldn't pay for the things I had to have, and the tradespeople got impertinent and began to bully and make scenes. And Madame Cromer offered . . . she was so delightfully easy at first . . . it all seemed so simple, and nobody would know . . . she was like a friend, . . . and of course I thought Fred's thing would begin to pay every minute. I kept writing all the time to Fred, and he took no notice of my letters—devil! And I began to sell things, you know, things you missed—pictures and china—I said they were broken—we sent Mary away about them, don't you remember? And you were so stupid you never guessed what was going on . . . And then Madame Cromer changed her tone—oh, you wouldn't believe how insolent she was!—and wouldn't make any more advances, or renew or anything—it nearly drove me mad! I did everything I could; I even tried to write a novel to make money, and old St. Jerome said it was no good . . . And then Aunt Elspeth died, and she didn't leave me anything to speak of, as I had hoped . . . and then I went to a Jew place in Holborn and borrowed

something at awful interest to go on with, and I haven't paid that. I renewed, but it's all no good! The house rent is due now—I dare say *they* would wait—but Cromer won't, she is a perfect devil."

Munday was pacing round the room during the flood of revelation. He stopped.

"Then what you have immediately to dread is this execution, isn't it? What have you put in?"

"Only my own things, Ferdinand. Chiefly the furniture of this room, which I paid for myself—that wardrobe—that cabinet—"

"My Sheraton cabinet!"

"Dear, it's mine. You gave it me. Don't you remember I made you write down on a slip of paper that you did give it me? That was to show the people it did belong to me. And that corner cupboard and that little marquetry table—I had to sign something every time to show it belonged to me."

His eye rested on each article of furniture as she enumerated it, and in the course of its wanderings rested on the *rivière* of diamonds lying on the dressing-table. His eyebrows went up interrogatively?

"Paste!" said she laconically.

"You sold your mother's wedding present!"

"I got seven hundred pounds for them at Levi's."

"They were worth three times the money. Why didn't you consult me? Why didn't you tell me you were hard up? I would have painted a pot-boiler for you—as I shall have to do," said he bitterly.

"I wish to God I had."

"Now, when it's too late!"

"Oh, Ferdinand, are we really ruined?" she cried, bursting into tears.

Munday did not contest the plural.

"We shall see," he said. "I do not know yet. I'll know by to-morrow. I'll do what I can. Are you sure you have told me everything?"

"Ye-es," she said doubtfully.

"Is there anything else I ought to know? What about a letter you said some one—Davenant—had? Is it anything to do about this business?"

She wrung her hands together piteously, but did not speak.

"You may as well make a clean breast of it, Lydia, while you are about it," her husband said coldly. "I can't possibly help you if I am left in the dark."

"He's sure to tell you himself if I don't," said

she, after a long pause of internal conflict. "It is about some letters——"

"Bearing on this matter? Surely you haven't taken Davenant into your confidence?"

"No, no, Ferdinand—no, indeed. I've told nobody. Is it likely? Nobody knows it. You wouldn't if you hadn't happened to come in when I was talking in my sleep. But you had better know about it, I think. It's nothing—only some letters I wrote to him when we were friends—long ago. He threatens to show them——"

"To me? Let him! He knows I wouldn't look at them."

"Wouldn't you? You trust me then? Oh no, I shouldn't mind you—but——"

"Has he tried to blackmail you?"

"No, he hasn't, so far, but he means to use them against me. I've offended him somehow, you know."

"Can the letters do any harm?"

"They can make me ridiculous," she said, blushing deeply. "He is an utter cad. I wish to God I had never known him. Now don't say, 'I told you so,' for I can't bear it."

"I wasn't going to say anything of the sort."

"You're very generous, Ferdinand. You are a gentleman. I never knew any one so——"

He coldly ignored her compliments. "Yes, I will see Davenant to-morrow—and Cohen—and your brother—"

"Fred has gone back to Manchester."

"Cohen hasn't, I happen to know—he's got a place in Holborn."

"Why, Ferdinand, I didn't know that."

"I know a great deal more about those people than you think. Lie down now and go to sleep. It's nearly morning. You looked ghastly this evening. I suppose all this has been worrying you."

"Worrying me ! Ferdinand, it's killing me. I've grown quite thin over it. See ! Feel !" She held out a thin little stick of an arm for his inspection. "I've lost all my looks, I am afraid." She looked up at him as if she expected to be contradicted, but all he said was—

"You must rest. Are you doing anything to-morrow ?"

"We are to go to the first night at the Pall Mall with Mrs. Malory."

"Oh, well, you had better give that up. Send an excuse. You are not fit for it." He turned down the light. "I will take all these papers and go over them, and see what is to be done. Go to sleep now, and don't think of this. I'll undertake it all, if you will allow me. Can you sleep ?"

"Yes, I think so," she murmured drowsily. Her eyes were closing from sheer exhaustion.

"That's right. Don't think of it. Trust me—if you can."

"I . . . you are very good to me! Yes, I think I *will* go to sleep. Good-night . . . Would you give me a kiss before you go?" she asked humbly.

He kissed her.

SCENE XXVII

"WELL, what do you think of it?" I asked Mrs. Munday, as the curtain went down on the first act of *The Doctor's Wife*, Poingdestre's latest sociologistic play.

"I think she's splendid—perfectly splendid—Mr. St. Jerome!" replied Mrs. Munday, exhibiting a most unusual enthusiasm—for her, and, woman-like, declining to consider anything but the feminine interest of the play, as embodied in the new actress, Miss Ilma Loraine.

"It is a completely fresh method," said Mrs. Hugo Malory, our hostess, beaming all over with æsthetic appreciation. "That quiet, almost languid delivery, that absence of rant, that harmony of gesture, impress me more than anything I ever saw before in English acting. And such a beautiful girl too!"

I had dined early with Mrs. Malory in Hill Street, and she had brought me on to her box at the Pall Mall Theatre. The Mundays were to meet us there, but it was Lydia alone who

appeared at the rising of the curtain, explaining that her husband had not been able to escort her, and would come on later.

"Ferdinand has been out all day and didn't even come home to dinner," she complained. "I've not seen him since this morning."

I fancied she was anxious to see him, for she watched the door furtively, and twisted her neck violently round every time there occurred one of those little clicks of the lock inevitable in a draughty theatre. The thin muscles of her neck, with its collar of rather mediocre diamonds, stood out as she strained them. She was dressed in hard metallic black, which suited her but ill, I thought. She had completely lost the look of super-abundant health and energy which used to distinguish her, and which, with her regular features and piquancy of expression, gave her her rank among the pretty women of London. Moreover —another thing struck me! Had our dear Lydia taken to making up? Was she losing her looks, and conscious of it? I could not utterly repudiate either suggestion.

Mrs. Malory used her glasses, and looked round the house. "There is the little Bowen with young Davenant," she announced, and Lydia's eyes followed anxiously in the direction she indicated. "I'm glad you dropped him, dear."

"But have you not forgiven him?" I asked Mrs. Munday, in a low voice. "I saw you talking to him at the ball last night."

My remark appeared to embarrass her; she had no repartee ready. "And there's your sister," I continued, "in the stalls with—why, it's Fred—and his wife? I thought they lived in Manchester?"

"Fred happens to be in town on business connected with my aunt's death."

"I think I must go and speak to Miss Barker. Have you any messages?"

"None for Fred," said his sister sombrely, "and I saw Lucy this morning."

* * * * *

"You are with Lydia, I see," said Lucy—Fred and his wife were talking to the man in front. "She looks all right up there. I suppose she has been making herself up a little."

I thought Lucy spiteful. "Making herself up?"

"Poor girl, I'm sure it's quite excusable. If you had seen her this morning you would wonder she is here at all. She quite frightened me! I never saw her like that before."

"Like what?"

"She wasn't herself—quite—she talked nonsense. She was still in bed—at twelve o'clock! Luckily I came in. She tossed about, and kept telling me the room was full of white butterflies!"

Ferdinand had gone out—for a wonder—and I sent for the doctor on my own responsibility. He gave her something and told her to stay in bed. Of course she disobeyed him and came here. I shouldn't be surprised if she were to faint! She looks pretty ghastly, in spite of her rouge."

"I will look after her."

"Now don't, for heaven's sake, say a word about it to her," exclaimed Lucy, in a fright. "She would be savage with me for telling you; she hates people to know when she is ill. I think she'll die sitting up. She never gives in."

"I always admire pluck, everywhere," I remarked shortly. "Good-night." I had never liked Lucy less.

I made my way back to the other side of the house. Half-way I was accosted by an attendant who asked me if I was the gentleman who had been sitting in the stage-box? On receiving my answer in the affirmative she put a folded note into my hand, saying, "From Miss Ilma Loraine." Inside was scribbled in pencil, "Dear Mr. St. Jerome,—Will you come and see me after the first act? I must speak to you." There were two initials at the end that I could not make out, they were neither I. nor L. Asking the girl to convey my assurance to Miss Loraine that I would go to her, I went on, very much puzzled. I have

very little connection with persons and matters theatrical, and could not imagine why I should have been selected for this overture on the part of the leading lady, and on the first night too, when she might have been expected to have her hands full!

Ferdinand Munday was just being ushered into the box as I came up. He looked ill generally, and overworked, and yet somehow I was more impressed with his extreme good looks than ever.

His wife turned sharply round as we came in. Her eyes sought his eagerly, though she said nothing.

But when he had shaken hands with his hostess, and was proceeding to take off his coat and hang it up, she half rose and made a pretence of helping him. It was merely an excuse for asking him a question. "Is it all right?" I heard her say, in a short sharp whisper, full of pent-up anxiety. He nodded gravely and sat down.

Lydia gave a little gasp of relief and clutched her necklace. Then she began to chatter away to me in her usual manner, though I caught myself wishing she would not bite her reddened lips so fiercely and so often—it made me nervous.

"Well, and what does the Philistine Fred say to it all?" she inquired vivaciously. "They can't be used to this sort of thing down Manchester way.

To elope or not to elope ! That is the question ! The poor doctor's wife hasn't even the excuse that her husband is odious. Oh no, that wouldn't be modern enough. He's delightful, so is the lover. There's no villain—except incompatibility."

"The most insidious of all. Such a problem couldn't have been put on the stage at all five or six years ago," said I.

"Six years ago there couldn't have been a woman found to act it. This Miss Loraine has the art, it seems to me, of saying the most impossible things in the most natural and unoffending manner," said Mrs. Malory.

The curtain went up, and Miss Loraine was discovered "arranging flowers," that time-honoured artifice of the stage. She wore a tea-gown, impossible but beautiful. It was fashionable, for the two women went into ecstasies about it, but to me it had a strange suggestion of the mystic wonderful colour harmonies, evanescent, indescribable, that characterize the draperies of Ferdinand Munday's mediæval figures. The actress herself reminded me of his type. She had wonderful dreamy eyes, and one of her best "effects" was a certain childish way she had of looking straight out before her, unheeding, unseeing, a gesture full of a strange pathos that quite outran the mimic woes with which she was supposed to be concerned.

"Of course Ferdinand is dying to get hold of her to paint," said Lydia Munday. "That's the point of view from which he always looks at a woman. It's rather the Nevill France type, only fair, he has been wanting for two years. Ferdinand, you shall paint her portrait, and send it to the 'New,' and it shall be the success of the season. It's quite the fashionable thing now, to paint the fashionable actress."

"It is her voice that appeals to me," murmured Mrs. Malory. "It has the *timbre* of a voice I once knew—the voice of a person who has gone out of my life——" she paused sadly.

Munday glanced at her with a certain sympathy, but said nothing. He had an opera glass and used it continually. Lydia borrowed it now and then. "She's really very handsome!" she was good enough to remark patronizingly from time to time. "I dare say she is a perfect fool—actresses generally are—there's no need of intellect in it, I've always heard. It's the lowest of the arts. But she'll be the beauty of the season I've not the slightest doubt. We will get to know her, and give a party, with her for the attraction . . . I've been rather neglecting society of late."

She was aggressively cheerful, almost vulgar. Nobody attended to her beyond the requirements

of politeness. Munday and Mrs. Malory were absorbed in the play ; I was wondering what this exquisite creature, who never even looked up to our box, could possibly have to say to me ?

She had had very little to do as yet, she had been husbanding her resources. Social problems, points of amorous casuistry, all the farrago of philosophy and sentiment that go to make up a modern play, held their sway during the second act, but one felt all through the cold *aura* of a catastrophe. The doctor's wife loved, and loved amiss. Should she renounce ? should she love and lie ? should she fly with her lover and ruin the life and honour of the man she had married —for love ? For love—mind you, there lay the sting. As the dialogue seethed and simmered round the problem, the audience were alternately swayed to the side of renunciation, or expediency, or the world well lost, when a fatal accident brought the lover dying to the husband's door, in imminent need of his professional aid. The irrepressible cry of the doctor's wife, cruel, reckless, woman-like, brought down the house. “Save him ! Save him ! for I love him !”

“ Impossible !” was muttered here and there when the curtain went down, but the word was drowned in the tumult of applause evoked by the convincingness of Miss Loraine's imperson-

ation of the morbid heroine. Then the sound common-sense of the world reasserted its sway, in the voice of Mrs. Munday—

“What an absurd situation!” she babbled. “How foolish those three looked staring at each other! There is no way out of it that I can see! The situation’s impossible!”

“The author will find a way out of it,” I said. “In real life it’s more difficult.”

“The curtain saves all!” said Munday. “When the playwright thinks he has given us enough of it, or doesn’t know how to get the people off, he rings down the curtain, and there’s an end—for the time.”

“Yes,” said I, moralizing, “but life—inexorable life—goes on; and we have the rags and tatters of passion—the sordid necessities of existence—the picking up of the pieces——”

“There’s nothing to be done, that I can see,” repeated Lydia. “All their lives are spoilt. The only way is for the lover to die, and end it neatly.”

“Life doesn’t care to preserve the unities. We shall have some lame and impotent conclusion or other,” I said, making haste to leave the box and keep my strange appointment with the leading lady.

“This way, sir! . . . This way, please . . .” After an interminable series of such hints I found myself in the hands of the call-boy at the end of a gas-

lighted passage, who then surrendered me to Miss Loraine's maid, who was hanging about the door of her dressing-room. She opened it and introduced me.

It was a narrow little slip of a room, but it was one of the best in the Pall Mall Theatre. A tall woman rose from a low chair on to which she seemed to have flung herself in an access of stage exhaustion, and came forward to meet me, holding her lace handkerchief to her lips.

"Miss Loraine?" I said doubtfully.

But she seized both my hands and held them; she was trembling all over. "No, no, Nevill France! Have you forgotten me? Am I so changed?"

Her eyes, as she plunged them into mine, seemed to hold all the tragedy of all the world.

I was a few moments adjusting my recollections of her, during which she dropped my hands and murmured—"How cruel of you not to remember me! Am I so changed—for the worse?" Her mobile eyebrows went up, and the whole face reverted from tragedy to comedy.

Well, I recollect Nevill France chiefly as a pale-faced, dark-haired, overgrown, untidy young girl who used to infest Ferdinand Munday's studio, and run his wife's errands for her, and act generally as her *souffre-douleur*—a young woman

whose incontestable beauty hardly compensated for her lack of style, of manner, of pose—qualities which, in common with our dear Lydia, I value highly. I found difficulty in connecting that vision of other days with this brilliant, supple, conscious, enslaving creature, armed by art and nature at all points for conquest ; whose beautiful figure, as she stood before me, waiting breathless for my recognition, had nothing of Nevill France, except its slimness, and whose yellow hair lay on her forehead in rings of premeditated artlessness where Nevill's dark crisped locks were used to trail at their own will.

I said so, not in so many words.

"It's a wig," said she brusquely, pulling at a string somewhere, and it suddenly came off, and floods of dark hair rolled out and down her neck. The action would have been grotesque if it had not been so swift and dramatic. "Dreadful, isn't it ? but one has to," said she apologetically. "See, you know me now ! You remember me as the Burne-Jones girl, don't you ? So does everybody. I was like that once. But that sort of thing won't do on the stage, it is too ineffective. Now sit down and tell me all about it !"

She had all the over-ease, the weary aplomb of the actress, but I could see under it all, how all her nerves were "on end," as the saying is,

with the excitement of the part she had been playing.

"I am on in ten minutes," she announced ; "not long to learn the history of two whole years, is it? Tell me. I sent for you because I knew you would be kind and tell me all I want to know. I look on you as an old friend . . . How is he? Is he well? Is he happy? Is she good to him? I've heard nothing for two whole years." Her eyes looked at me hungrily; with her loosened dark hair and big sad eyes she looked like Nevill now. I did not even ask her whom she intended to designate by the frequent pronoun.

"He is very successful. They have made him an R.A."

"But is he well?"

"Fairly well. He works too hard."

"Ah, he always did that! She never let him off. Go on, tell me! . . . Do you mind if my maid comes back and arranges all this? Blonde I was in the first act, and blonde I must remain."

The dresser came in and deftly restored the yellow wig, and her mistress sat in front of her glass and chattered to me the while in that brilliant irresponsible style, as of a wise, all-knowing yet simple child, that startled while it fascinated me. She was a creature of nerves now, and kept her

self-control for the stage. I never could talk to Nevill France, I remember ; with Miss Loraine I spoke on equal terms, as to a woman of the world.

"Does he recognize me ?" she asked eagerly. "Does he think I am playing up? I think I have got them, don't you—the audience, I mean? I felt they were with me—but I want you to tell me what he thinks."

"His wife is chaffing him about his wanting to paint Miss Ilma Loraine."

"Paint me! Ah, what a long time ago that is! I am so different now! . . ." Her eyes grew distant. "When I remember what a little fool I was; I had no pluck, no *savoir vivre*. I ran away . . . That is my dear Mrs. Malory you are with, isn't it?" Like most artists, she was transitional.

"Yes; she was always so fond of you. Why have you kept her and your other friends in ignorance of your whereabouts all this time?" I asked reproachfully.

"Because—oh, because—" the dresser had glided away, "I begged Calder-Marston not to give me away. I was very, very miserable when I left England. I wanted to cut the traces and forget it all. I wanted to work at my art, and to think of nothing else—to live for it ; and I did, I worked like a slave."

"To very good purpose," I said admiringly.

"Do you think so? I am glad. But it isn't done in a moment, you know—all this," waving her hand round the room, which, small as it was, represented the position of leading lady to one of the most important theatres in London. "It was perfect drudgery abroad. Calder-Marston has been very kind, but it was Festugères who was my real master, and bullied me—into any proficiency I may have. Do you think London will like me now I am here? This is a silly play, isn't it? but it is full of good things." The call-boy knocked at the door just then, and we heard the roar of applause as the curtain went up on an elaborate rural scene in the Highlands. "I am on in five minutes. Come outside—shall we? Then I shall be ready for my call . . . Do you think he knows I am Nevill?"

"I don't know, I am sure. He is very quiet, and looks at you very often. I should not have recognized you."

"Ah, but you must remember he knows my face better than you do. His pencil has travelled all over it." Her smile had a sweet subtle triumph in it. "Tell me, shall you tell him?"

"Shall I?"

"No, I think, not yet. It would make me miss my cues perhaps. I mustn't play tricks with my

part! But I will look up at the very last,
when——”

“What is going to happen? Is there a good curtain?”

“I shall not tell you. I don’t mean to give my author away . . . My call!” she exclaimed suddenly, with a brilliant confident glance. “I go!”

The rapturous applause that greeted her re-entry on the stage was in my ears as I made my way back to the box, and poor Lydia Munday.

* * * * *

“Where have you been, Mr. St. Jerome?” asked the latter gaily, as I came in. Her cheerfulness struck me as intensely pathetic somehow. Pathos had not been in Lydia Munday’s *rôle* so far, but I seemed to foresee that, among other developments of the human comedy, in store for her in the future. “You look quite dazed!”

“He looks as if he had been away seven years with the Queen of Fairyland—so bewildered, so other-worldish,” said the poetical-minded Mrs. Malory. “Have you come back to earth with a disdain for ordinary mortals, Mr. St. Jerome?”

“He has been flirting with Miss Loraine perhaps,” hazarded Mrs. Munday lightly. “No—I

don't suppose there would be room for you, Mr. St. Jerome. There are so many. I'm told one of the princes is madly in love with her. Mr. Bowen has been here telling us all the gossip. She's not married, he says—English by birth—Calder-Marston is her devoted slave. He goes bragging everywhere how he discovered her . . . She's quite good . . ." She turned her eyes to the play. "Well, is she going to run away with her lover—the doctor's wife, I mean? It would be playing it rather low down on the husband!"

"Husbands are accustomed to that . . . on the stage anyhow."

"The doctor's wife will find another way," said Mrs. Malory sagely.

She did. The play was a tragedy. A cry, a groan, a forcing from her nerveless fingers by her husband of a sharp surgical knife abstracted from his surgery, told the audience of the wife's solution of the problem. Her eyes, as she twisted them in the death agony, met Lydia's.

"It's Nevill!" she whispered to me. "Ferdinand, it's Nevill!"

"I know," he answered, without taking his eyes away.

I helped Mrs. Malory to put on her cloak as the curtain fell. Ferdinand was backward with his offer to help his wife to find hers, and she did

it for herself. I caught sight of her determined face in the mirror at the side of the box, her tight lips set. I heard the sharp click of the clasp as she fastened it at the neck. She stood stiffly beside me through the applause, which was long and loud.

Nevill France's grave eyes, as she bowed and acknowledged her thanks, took in the group we formed. Mrs. Malory, still unaware of her *protégée's* identity, indulged in various enthusiastic comments, in which the rest of us, from various reasons, did not loudly participate.

Mrs. Munday took my arm down-stairs. She was rather pale.

"Miss France has the world at her feet," I said, by way of making conversation. "She is wonderful, isn't she?"

"Wonderful!" repeated Lydia, like a parrot, then, "I always think, do you know, that a woman, to act like that, must be more or less of a fool!"

* * * * *

"Will you drop me at the Foreign Office?" said Mrs. Malory to the Mundays. "I have to go on there, and I'm late. Then the carriage can take you home."

Mrs. Munday accepted.

"Thank you, I think I will walk!" said Munday. "I want a word with St. Jerome."

His wife gave him a long suspicious look, but said nothing. Ferdinand put the two women into the carriage, and then turned away with me. But he seemed to have nothing particular to say, and took a cab almost immediately.

SCENE XXVIII

"WHY, there's a light in the studio!" exclaimed Mrs. Munday, as she got out of Mrs. Malory's brougham and began to let herself in with her own latch-key. "Ferdinand must have got home first somehow. It was that block at the Foreign Office. Good-night, dear Mrs. Malory, and thank you so much."

She rustled up-stairs through the dark house to the studio. There was a noise of easels being rolled about. As she approached the door the electric light was suddenly turned off.

"Where are you? What are you doing, Ferdinand?"

The white of a shirt-front gleamed in the semi-darkness of the summer night as Munday came forward to meet her. She went across to the electric button and impatiently turned on both the lights. He stared at her mutely.

"I declare, Ferdinand, your hair looks quite grey in this light. Don't look at me as if I were

a ghost, instead of your real flesh-and-blood wife. What have you got that old thing out for?" she asked, pointing to a large canvas which had been dragged into unusual prominence. It was the "Fiammetta" for which Nevill France had sat two years ago. The tall solemn mediæval figure, with its straight draperies, and the faint adumbration of the white lily in the hair like a halo, seemed to look down in mute reproach on Lydia in her fussy fashionable elegance, as she moved nearer and contemplated it through her glasses.

"Ah, she's not like that now! No lilies and languors about her—I should say the roses and raptures, etc., were nearer the mark." She looked round as if she expected her husband to resent this criticism, but he did not seem to have heard her.

"Wake up, Ferdinand! You look quite idiotic! Why have you got this out? What are you going to do with it?"

"I have sold it to Verschoyle to-day."

"Unfinished?"

"I shall finish it."

"From memory?" said she anxiously.

"From memory—yes."

"I thought you had gone round there, when you wouldn't come home with us."

"Gone round where?"—he spoke sharply.

"To see that girl!"

Munday came a step forward. "Look here," he said, "I have sold this picture to meet the demands of your creditors. I didn't intend to sell it at all, as you know. I do not wish you to say anything about it, or of the lady who was once good enough to sit to me for it. What concerns you is that Verschoyle is going to give me nine hundred for it. That will satisfy your dressmaker to begin with, and then——"

"Madame Cromer! But, Ferdinand, we are not going to pay her, surely? I thought you said——"

"Certainly, she must be paid. You owe her the money."

"But, Ferdinand, I asked you in the theatre if it was all right, and you said it was." She began to cry.

"It's all right, in the sense that you won't be sold up on Tuesday, but money spent is spent, and we have got to pay what you owe. And there's a good deal behind Madame Cromer, isn't there?—as I saw by your papers last night. You don't suppose we can go on as we have been going on, even with the income we have—or that we had—and not come to grief?"

"You mean as I have been going on?"

"Well, if you like to accuse yourself——"

"But I have been shockingly cheated," she cried wildly. "Haven't I?—now haven't I? You have only got to look at my bills."

"Of course you have been cheated. You laid yourself open to it when you chose to deal with cads and scoundrels. They would have been fools as well if they hadn't taken advantage of your ignorance."

"Oh, Ferdinand, don't scold me, but tell me what you have done about it. Did you see Cohen? I do hope you haven't muddled it."

Ferdinand smiled—the return to her old manner was so characteristic. "I don't think you need trouble yourself about the means I used. I put a certain alternative before Mr. Benjamin Cohen, and the poor man has so little character that he couldn't afford to lose the little reputation he has left. He thought it wisest to hand me back a portion of the money you placed in his syndicate."

"But it's all spent!"

"Not all—only about half."

"Surely, surely, Ferdinand, you never got anything back from the Cohen gang?"

"I did. I got back five thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds. I cashed Mr. Cohen's cheque for that amount at his own bank half-an-hour after he gave it me."

"Ferdinand!"

"What?"

"Oh, it's impossible! I am dreaming. No one ever got back money from Ben Cohen, or Sam Mendoza, or Roberts."

"My dear, you are over-wrought! Look, here are the notes! Fifty-seven hundreds and five tens! Will that convince you?"

"But—what did you say?—How did you manage? Cohen is the hardest financier, the shrewdest man, the greatest scoundrel in Manchester, and you made him—you, a mere artist—a perfect——"

"A perfect fool, in money matters! I suppose I am. Well, it all came of my happening to know of a very mean little trick of this same Mr. Benjamin Cohen—a little private and particular swindle over a picture of mine, an extremely dirty transaction—but I never troubled to go to law over it. It was simpler to put up with the loss. But I reminded him of the matter to-day. I didn't beat about the bush; I simply told him the story would be told in a criminal court of law unless— Mr. Cohen thought it best not to waste words—he walked straight to his desk—I see he is a thorough man of business. As I was putting the alternative to him, he took out his cheque-book. The cheque was drawn to X. Y. or bearer, and he said he wouldn't trouble me for a receipt."

"Ferdinand, you are quite wonderful!" She

half shut her eyes; they filled with tears in the ecstasy of her relief. She sat down beside him, first turning off all the lights but one, out of a new-born instinct of economy. "We can talk in the dark," she said. "I wish, Ferdinand—I wish he had given it *all* back!"

"Ah, my dear, be thankful—"

"Shall we have to leave this house?" she asked, still in the same complaining tone of voice.

"We must try to let it, and if we can't we must run it as cheaply as possible. We must live exceedingly quietly."

"Just what I hate," murmured she.

"It can't be helped. We are by no means out of the wood yet. Besides, you have been retrenching and economizing all this time, it appears, by yourself, without me to help you. It never even occurred to me that we were hard up."

"Yes, didn't I manage well?" she cried, with a gleam of triumph. "You never even guessed. I didn't even feed you badly, did I, Ferdinand? But I used to lie awake at nights and wonder, wonder what would become of me. And you were quite unconscious. I hated you sometimes for not knowing. I wanted to come behind you, as you sat at your easel, and shout it in your ear. And it was so irritating to see you toil and moil away at things for ever—'making them better'—when they were

quite good enough to sell as they were! I took one picture away, and sold it myself to Wigan—a little sketch of Swanbergh—you forgot about it. There you were, day after day, striving after your ideal—worrying along till you pleased yourself—when if you pleased other people it was all that was needed. You were enough to vex a saint with your stupid ideals and standards!"

"All right!" he said. "You won't have that to complain of now."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that I shall have to sacrifice my ideals, as you call them, and paint simply for money—like so many other poor devils!"

"Well, don't you always?"

"Oh, Lydia!"

"Ah, you mean paint pot-boilers?"

"Don't!" said he, shivering a little.

"Poor thing!"

He looked up surprised as she sat down beside him, raised his hand that hung helpless, and stroked it almost tenderly.

"Poor Ferdinand, you hate it all, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"I suppose, now, you will say I've ruined your life?" she continued, not urgently.

"I am not likely to say anything of the kind."

"But you'll think it?"

"Don't worry me, dear."

"Poor Ferdinand!" she said again. "No, you weren't meant for this sort of thing. You were meant to live in a nice garden in a wood, and paint pretty pictures at your leisure, instead of struggling with the hard, ugly, matter-of-fact world, and now you are going to—for my sake! It is good of you, and I appreciate it. You're the only man I've ever known well, except Fred, and he would have left me to starve. Ferdinand—" She looked at his quiet, impassive face and cried out brusquely—"Oh, I've been a beast—and worse, an idiot!—but still, you know, it wasn't——"

"Don't excuse yourself, dear, I am not condemning you."

"No, you're not, that's why I am condemning myself. If you scolded me it would put my back up at once . . . Well, I'll be brave; it's going to be a hateful time for me, but it won't last for ever. You will soon paint us round, won't you? I'll sit for you, to save models. You can work quite quickly if you like, I know, and you'll get heaps of commissions, if you'll only condescend to take them up. You have always been so haughty. People are always wanting little, cheap showy nymphs and so on, to hang up. You can run them off like anything, if you try. Oh, you will soon paint us round! I have the greatest confidence in you. I

assure you I feel quite cheerful now, by comparison —after the misery of the last year. It has been a fearful strain on me. It has quite hurt my health. But you must be kind to me, and consoling. I shall tell you everything now. I wonder if there's anything else that is bothering me? . . . What is this hard thing in your pocket?"

"Oh, I was forgetting!" he exclaimed. "Your letters to Davenant. Had you forgotten about them?"

"Quite," said she, lying. "Tell me, did he make a fuss?"

"A little—yes—he made some trifling difficulty."

"And you?"

"Oh, I got him to see it from my point of view."

"You acted complete indifference, I suppose, and got him that way."

"I don't know that I acted it," said Munday carelessly. "Here, take them!"

"That's not very complimentary to your wife, is it?" She affected to bridle, but the tears of mortification came into her eyes as she stretched out her hand for the little packet tied with string which he handed to her, while his eyes wandered back to the portrait.

"Did Cossie tie them up like that?"

"No—I did—to keep them together."

Her eyes looked an interrogation.

"I have not read them—if you mean that."

"Will you—now?" she said, with some hesitation, holding out the packet; "you have the right to . . . but . . . I had so much rather you didn't." She laid her head on his shoulder. He smiled bitterly.

"Do you think I ought to read them?"

"Not ought, but if you want to——?"

"Are they compromising?"

"No, worse—silly!"

He laughed outright; it was a disagreeable laugh for her to hear. "Give them to me," he said.

Obediently she handed them to him, and he rose, and tearing off the string, threw them loosely into the empty grate, and held a lighted match under them. They were slow in igniting, and curled and twisted for a long while under their eyes before they burnt fairly.

"I had no idea it was so hard to burn letters," said Ferdinand, holding one match under them after another. "It isn't dramatic; they ought to blaze up at once!"

"So they would, if they were compromising," said Lydia, with a feeble attempt at gaiety. She stood behind him as he knelt by the grate, and laid her hand on his hair.

The broad jet discs of her bodice gleamed in the light, she seemed clad in a hard sheath-like coat of

mail. The flames flickered down to grey ash, and he rose.

"Oh, Ferdinand, I love you. Do you love me? Say you do, oh, say you do!" She cast her arms round him as he stood in the middle of the studio. The sleeves fell back to her shoulders with a clash of metallic embroidery, "Why are you so stony? What a hard face!—but I love it." She touched his cheek with her fingers. "You have such dark sad eyes! Love me!"

Mechanically he put his arms round her shoulders and held her.

She went on. "Oh, don't let us be sad! It's all right, isn't it? I had a bad time this morning, but I'm going to forget it all. It will all be different now. We are going to be happy. We have lost a lot of money, but we have got each other. I've got you, and you have got me. Isn't that enough, Ferdinand? I never thought I loved you so. This sorrow has brought us together—and you were so nice about the letters. Ferdinand, do say something! Kiss me! I am kissing you, I don't often do that, but I do it now. You might at least kiss me back."

She tightened her arms till they met round his neck. She kissed him clumsily, violently, eagerly, again and again. The tears were in her voice as she repeated: "Ferdinand, don't you love me?—don't you?"

When he still did not answer she raised her head and looked in his face. His slack arms were round her indeed, but he was staring over her shoulder to where the white-robed Fiammetta stood, and drooped under the broad leaf of the lily.

Very slowly she withdrew her arms and pushed him away.

"I understand," she said dully, pointing to the picture. Her voice had a sharp note of anguish in it as she cried—"That's the woman you love! . . . Ferdinand! . . . Ferdinand! . . . I deserve it!"

THE END

Часть первая

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19





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